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APRIL, 1954

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**SECRET OF THE
IMMORTALS**

by Daniel F. Galouye

STORIES OF SCIENCE AND FANTASY



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Introducing the



AUTHOR



Roger Dee



THE perpetration of any writer's autobiography would seem to imply a personal history worth passing on to those readers who are interested enough—or thorough enough, collector-wise—to buy his stories. Be not misled; this one appears here, like a gravy-stain on your shirt-front, not because the life and exploits of Dee are of consuming interest but because IMAGINATION asked for it.

I've always envied those writers of science fiction and/or fantasy who earned their degrees at M.I.T. or who sand-hogged the foundations of Grand Coulee Dam or traveled burro-back across old Mexico with a jug of mescal just for the hell of it. Their experiences speak for themselves of enterprise

and originality and are, in this craft of writing more precious than Uranium 238. I envy those lucky ones more than ever just now, because a similar background would be a godsend at a moment when I'm faced with the problem of making the commonplace seem interesting.

Since that problem is plainly insoluble, and since Madge still wants a biog, I'll make with the simple statistics:

I was born in 1914 of parents who did not read science fiction, but who were made uneasily aware of its existence when I tackled TOM SWIFT AND HIS AERIAL WARSHIP at the age of seven. (Tom isn't s-f now, if he's around at all, but he was then!) The im-

(Continued on Page 112)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

APRIL 1954
NUMBER 5
VOLUME 4



MAY ISSUE ON SALE
MARCH 26th

Stories

SECRET OF THE IMMORTALS (Novel—25,000 words).....	by Daniel F. Galouye.....	6
The hero fought to escape death—not realizing that it was his one hope for survival!		
THE TRIAL (Short—4,200 words).....	by Milton Lesser	68
The hero looked forward to the day when he could return home—but did Earth want him?		
JOURNEY FOR THE BRAVE (Short—5,500 words).....	by Alan E. Nourse.....	78
The hero was not a coward, but facing the perils of space alone was making him one!		
THE DISEMBODIED MAN (Short—4,000 words).....	by Larry Maddock.....	94
The hero wanted to take the girl in his arms, but he had no arms—or body for that matter!		
THE FROGS OF MARS (Short—2,400 words).....	by Roger Dee.....	106
The hero saw pink elephants in a bar everybody laughs. But what if it's Martians?		

Features

INTRODUCING THE AUTHOR.....	2	BOOKKEEPER IN SPACE.....	104
THE EDITORIAL	4	SCIENCE FICTION LIBRARY.....	114
REVIEW OF COMING ISSUE.....	92	FANDORA'S BOX	116
PHYR TUNNELS	93	LETTERS FROM THE READERS	124

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The Editorial

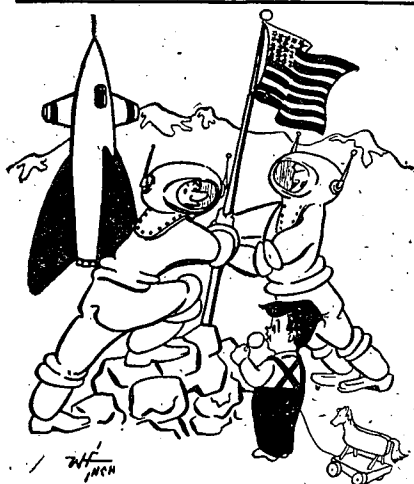
BACK in 1938 two men brought a tired and sick magazine into their publishing company. It was a business challenge to them to breathe new life into a near-dead publication. That they succeeded is history in the science fiction field. The men were William B. Ziff and Bernard Davis. The magazine was AMAZING STORIES. The Ziff-Davis imprint not only skyrocketed AMAZING STORIES to success, it was also largely instrumental in bringing science fiction to its present fruition as a recognized literary genre. The progressive policies and acumen of both men made them an unbeatable team.

EVERY team has a captain, and with Ziff-Davis it was Bill Ziff at the helm. His dynamic energies built not only a publishing empire but made him an international figure. Author, military strategist, statesman — his accomplishments form an endless list. But somewhere the chain must end, the team must breakup. For Ziff-Davis the end came—tragically—during the festive Christmas season just past. The science fiction world was saddened to learn that William B. Ziff was dead. A great era had come to an untimely close.

YOUR editor had the privilege of being part of the Ziff-Davis team for five years. One of many fond memories I have of that

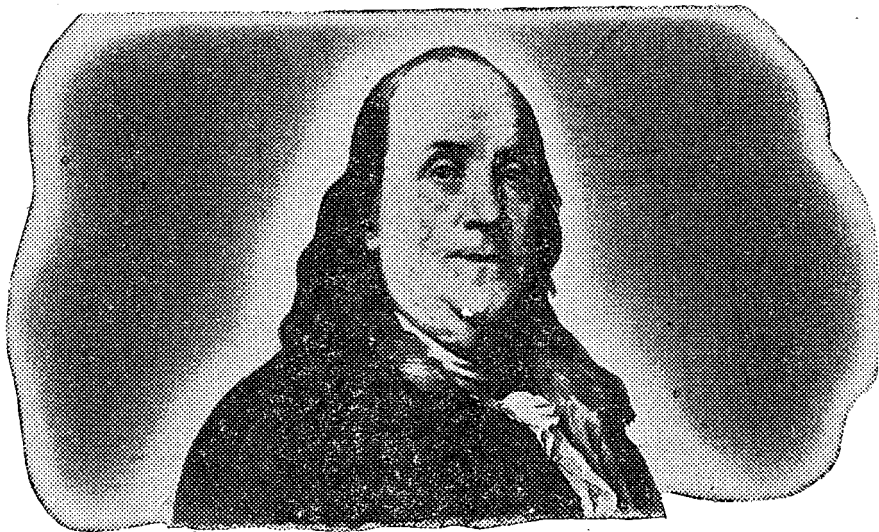
period is something Bill Ziff told me one day as I sat in his office. During the course of conversation he said, "I like to think that our editors are part of the Ziff-Davis family team; we solve each other's problems and enjoy the rewards together." His was a friendly and gracious charm that instilled confidence and engendered success. And the team feeling he fostered made a Z-D editor loyal to him for life.

BUT life is ephemeral, and for Bill Ziff the saga is now ended. But he fought death hard, refusing to relinquish tomorrow and the future. Which traditionally is the mark of all great men . . . wh



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Secret Of The Immortals

By

Daniel F. Galouye

Berek knew he must avoid capture, for it meant mandatory death on Exhibition Plaza. And yet, strangely, he must die — in order to live!

BEREK cringed in the deep shadows at the edge of the utility landing level, staring fearfully at the three men drifting by overhead. Silhouetted against a scant vista

of sky left naked in the space between towering edifices, the trio moved forward in determined strokes. They propelled themselves by the rubberoid flippers which were the regalia of the Correctional Corps.

Their heads, encumbered with bulbous but weightless auxiliary scanner-detector instruments, swept first to the right then to the left. Desperately, Berek tried to stifle his breathing.

One of the Corpsmen broke off and started down in a slow cautious spiral and Berek stiffened, his mind whirling. Why, he wondered abruptly, was he fleeing? Why was he *fighting* death? Why should anyone *resist* normal death?

His mandatory death date had passed—more than a quarter of a century ago. But he hadn't gone to the disposal chamber at the designated time. Why, he didn't know. Something had happened to snip off his memory while he was waiting for the final directive.

And now, here he was crouching in the deep metal-walled abysses near the Central Administration Area—lost in the man-made canyons with the horrible realization that he was desperately afraid to die!

He gasped. The spiraling Corpsmen was suddenly plunging down at full gravity. The other two

cast off their weightless headgears and dived after him.

In a frantic reflex, Berek sprang from the metal floor and kicked off against the wall, activating his subcutaneous degravitator with a light hand pressure against his left side.

Lancelike, he streaked upward and outward. But air resistance soon killed his initial speed and he used desperate overhand strokes to sweep up and over the next building.

Then he was thrashing toward the higher cornice of the adjacent structure. As he reached it, he twisted full around and bent his knees, letting his feet touch against the slick metal. Pistoning his legs to full extension, he shot out with a terrific recoil in a new direction, fighting his way upward toward sky-touching spires.

But his pursuers had altered their course in a broad descending arc to intercept his line of flight.

A white beam of lethal light flared off to his left, grazed a projecting ledge. The metallic substance vaporized.

Berek pivoted around a smaller spire, and shot down between two squat buildings. Then abruptly he was in a path of hazy bright light that twisted and wove between the buildings.

The aura-like lane was dotted with scores of leisurely moving

swimestrians. A group off to the left was sufficiently concentrated to offer a mass impulse which would overpower and jam the physio-detectors of the Corpsmen.

Meeting in with them, he adopted their almost timid, stroller strokes. To his rear three puzzled Corpsmen floated uncertainly over the lane.

Berek glanced at the group around him. They were all citizens past the mandatory retirement age of three hundred. They would probably be out until early morning and, by staying with them, he could be safe from the searching receptors of the hidden physio-detector stations. It was a principle he remembered from his duties in the Bioelectronic Department before he had retired more than five hundred years ago.

But he could not stay with them. There was a purpose in his continuing to exist in a world where everyone fervently expected death at the life-span limit of eight hundred . . . a tremendous purpose, he felt, hidden somewhere deep within his lost memory.

And he could only re-establish the quarter century of missing recollections by going back to the places he knew, by gathering all the threads that had been severed.

THE view through the one-way transparent metal of the outer

office wall was one of magnificent buildings stretching out in an endless array to the foot of the distant mountains . . . then up and over the peaks and rises to continue for hundreds of miles to the shores of the ancient sea.

Pensively, Diboar, Zonal Administrator, stood with his hands clenched behind his back, staring out at the metal spires and domes that glistened in the morning sunlight. His large head — totally hairless in its sixth stage of temporary baldness—was a pink, shining cupola faintly etched with traces of blood vessels that lay seemingly too close to the surface.

Finally he turned to face Zonal Correctional Corps Commander Lidorn. "You will immediately inform your flipper squads that he is *not* to be captured."

"Not to be captured!" The stout, perspiring man behind the desk sputtered incredulously. "But —"

"Not to be captured," Diboar repeated. "I want him to remain free. And I want him to assume that he has eluded us completely."

Lidorn rose hesitatingly. "I'm afraid I don't understand, Your Sub-Excellency. Aren't you primarily interested in submitting him to the memory probe so we will learn where the other post-mortals are, what their purpose is?"

"Of course I'm interested in that," Diboar said patiently. "But only as an alternate plan. Why chance shocking him into insanity with the probing impulses when a simple deception will serve as well? Public resentment might develop over the spectacle of a slobbering idiot in Execution Circle on Exhibition Plaza."

"What is the simple deception, Excellency?"

"That he be made to imagine he has escaped your Corpsmen. He will then return to the other post-mortal renegades. We'll get them all that way."

Lidorn shrugged, his eyes averted. "It seems to me," he said, "that we should insure the capture of this one while we are able to. Of all the renegades that we have on record, this Berék is the only one who has made a detected reappearance. And he is the one who has continued to exist illegally for the longest period—twenty-five years."

Diboar slammed his fist on the desk. "Regardless of your opinion, you will do as I direct!"

Lidorn shrank back in his chair. "I will relay your order, Excellency. He is only to be followed."

"Good! Perhaps now we shall learn what these disappearances mean." Diboar turned to stare reflectively through the transparent

outer wall.

Lidorn rose and walked to stand beside him. "Why the sudden interest in the post-mortals, Excellency?"

Diboar waited before answering. Then he spread his arms as though to include both the teeming array of buildings that could be seen and those invisible beyond the horizon. "There are countless billions who live normal lives on earth and the other habitable planets and satellites of the System. We are all psychologically conditioned to welcome death gratefully when our time is up.

"Were this not so, there would be overpopulation of the type that once engendered disease and what was known as war. There is no further colonization possible. Every acre of every planet and satellite is already overcrowded. Mandatory death is the only solution to survival of the race."

He shrugged, slid a hand over his taut scalp. "It would be different if there were unlimited space for colonization—if the distant worlds of other systems could be reached. But science has proven that the magnetic field surrounding the System cannot be pierced."

He turned stiffly toward Lidorn. "But here we have a group of persons who have found a way to resist mandatory death conditioning

... to *want to live* after reaching eight hundred! It isn't too improbable to assume that normal citizens might also begin questioning the entire system of restricted life-span, even their own conditioning! The post-mortals must be captured—and die!”

THE lights were dim but of sufficient intensity to illuminate the beads of moisture on the cavern walls—like sparkling, miniature diamonds.

The dark-haired girl warded off the cooling dampness with a shiver as she clasped her arms tightly about her. It was a proud stance, but the firm, pale skin of her face was marred by a deep frown.

“I’m worried, Osad,” she said nervously. “He should have been captured by now! But the official news has only been of his continued escape from the Corps.”

The man bore the appearance of one unbelievably old—old in a world where men and women lived out their poly-centenarian lives and still died without displaying physical infirmities. But there was an insatiable youthfulness in his eyes as he twisted his wrinkled face into a reassuring smile.

“He will be arrested, Vella. The Corps is doggedly persistent and efficient. Of course, we had hoped he would be taken before now. But

we realized the possibility he might resist capture.”

“I knew he would remain free this long,” she said listlessly, long lashes drooping down over dark, moist eyes. “I know him better than you do — even better than he knows himself. Even now he must be half crazy with his insistence on learning why he doesn’t want to die—why he has no memory.”

Osad frowned and sidled closer to the heat coils against the near wall of the cavern. A brief expression of indecision flared as he glanced to the left—into the chamber where dozens of persons huddled in silent, apprehensive groups.

“I’ll admit,” he said, “that you have outguessed all of us thus far on his reactions. But the result must be as we’ve planned. Berek’s capture and execution must be the most widely viewed event of the century.”

Villa’s eyes were moist. “But don’t you realize that even though he fears death now, he might be maneuvered into a position where he’ll be forced to try to kill himself, thinking he must *avoid* capture in our interest!”

Osad pursed his lips thoughtfully. “I hadn’t thought of that.”

“Or, worse yet,” the girl went on, “he may even be trying to trace his lost memory. I rather suspect he is! And he may *find*

us. If he does, he won't be alone. Hasn't it occurred to you that it would be impossible for him to remain free so long unless they purposely *didn't want* to capture him?"

Sudden realization showed on Osad's aged face. "You mean they may be using him to find the rest of us?"

She nodded. "We could not afford to be surprised here by the Correctional Corps."

Osad began pacing the earthen floor. "What do you propose?"

"I have an idea where he will flee, what he will do. I propose that I be sent to contact him briefly, tell him, without an explanation that he must be captured—that my life depends on it."

"But," he protested, "you could never convince him without an explanation! And I cannot let you leave. You will soon enter Phase Positive and if Diboar should capture you and observe that manifestation before we are ready to demonstrate it—"

"I must go to Berek; Osad! Anyway," she touched a small lump in the pocket of her blouse, "I have the poison capsule, just like every other post-mortal. I will not be afraid to use it if I am captured."

"I cannot let you risk your life,

child . . ." Osad placed a fatherly-hand on her shoulder, " . . . or the movement."

"But what else can we do?"

"Perhaps there is a way. If Diboar merely keeps Berek under surveillance it won't be difficult for us to learn his approximate location. We will call for a volunteer to inject him with one of the mild, ancient viruses. When the Corpsmen find him unconscious they will have to capture him for fear he will die a diseased death before they can execute him."

The girl shivered. But this time it was not from the dampness. "What else does he have to go through, Osad? It is not enough that he faces a death of torture? Must he also be wracked with frustration, defeat, even disease?"

She began to cry softly.

"Come now, my dear Vella," Osad said consolingly. "We must remember that no matter how cruel it seems, it is all part of the plan."

"But . . ."

"Don't think of him from a personal viewpoint." His thin hand clasped her shoulder. "Just think of all who are murdered every year in the thousands of disposal chambers throughout the System—of all who will be able to go on living if Berek succeeds!"

CHAPTER II

ALWAYS staying close to the center of the largest crowd he could find, Berek made his way from the public eating place and out into the dismal chasm, now illuminated only by rocket traces and a vestigial light in the western sky.

He had spent the day in deserted crevasses at the bottom level of the pyramid-like towers. But now, as throngs of swimmers again began to fill the lanes between the spires, he was able to venture out, safe from the detector-stations.

He swam his way up to the next higher level—toward a public conveyance station. He selected a car on the end.

He entered it rapidly, reaching under the panel to wrench loose the short, thick trunk wire even before relays in the occupant-identified circuit completed correlating his physio-properties.

Then he headed eastward above the spires, into the moonglow, setting the controls for maximum speed. Mile after mile of metal spires shot by below and he lost himself once more in the puzzle of missing memory and enigmatic will to live.

Vella—he wondered suddenly—what had happened to her? Had his wife died? Had she gone to the

disposal chamber? But, of course. She must have! She was only a year younger than he. She must have died only months after the beginning of his memory breach. A choking loneliness surged within him at the thought.

Twenty minutes later, after he had watched a hundred-mile stretch of administration buildings and laboratories float by below, the car braked and stopped above a rounded, squat building.

He looked down at the residential tierage where he and Vella had lived the six hundred years of their married lives. The transparent metal of its dome revealed a panorama of gay recreational activities on the top level.

As he left the car and swam down toward the structure, he wondered whether he could hope to find an indication here that Vella, too, had escaped mandatory death. Could he dare to hope to find a clue that would lead him to his lost memory?

He dropped down along the side of the transparent area, watching the fluttering violet light that filled the northwest play area—light that emanated from scores of flickering screens which displayed selected scenes of other worlds. The screens flaunted reproductions of lush planets that revolved around stars averaging thousands of light

years' distance from earth—worlds that would forever be unattainable to mankind.

At the four hundred and seventy-fifth level, he slowed his descent; he hovered pensively while he wondered whether his physiologic characteristics had been removed from the admit circuits. But his doubt disappeared as he reached the four hundred and sixty-second level and watched a rectangular area of metal suddenly fluoresce. He swam through the now immaterial wall and into a warmly lighted corridor.

The nostalgia grew deeper as he approached the admit panel of his former compartment—his and Vella's. The rectangular section of the wall glowed and he dropped to the floor in front of it, stepping through.

The lounging room was unchanged—exactly as he had last remembered it. Every article of furniture was in its place. The uni-lateral transparency of the outer wall admitted brilliant moonlight that bathed the couch where he and Vella had often sat in understanding silence. Impassionately, he closed his eyes and pictured her relaxed on the couch, himself seated on the floor while her hand played through his hair.

"Vella!"

He whispered the word forlorn-

ly into the pall of desolation that smothered the compartment. And his memory conjured up a picture of the woman who had been even more beautiful at the end of their six centuries together than she had been when he had first met her countless decades ago.

LIGHTS flared throughout the compartment.

A baby began crying.

A man appeared in the doorway to the right, his eyes cold, demanding.

"I—I had a friend," Berek began. "He used to live here. That's why I was able to enter and . . ."

"He hasn't lived here in two decades," the other snapped.

From the bedroom came the hushed, comforting voice of a young mother in soft lullaby:

"Sleep my dear, and be quiet,

"Though the long day's begun

"

Berek added helplessly, "I thought you might be able to tell —"

"I'm quite sure," the man interrupted harshly, "you'll find adequate records in Zonal Headquarters."

*"Patience will rush the night,
And with the world you will be
done."*

Berek went hastily back through the fluorescing rectangle.

At the corridor's next intersection he turned right and braked himself in mid-air, before a uniformed man who stood with a gun held stiffly in front of him.

"Full weight," the Corpsman directed threateningly.

Berek surrendered his weightlessness and dropped to the floor, tense.

From a pouch at his waist, the Corpsman withdrew a square metal box that spouted a light beam as he touched a switch in its side. He threw the spot on the captive and waited.

The light faded from a brilliant white, to a dull yellow, then to a vivid red. The instrument vibrated erratically, excitedly, and emitted a low, clacking sound. He turned it off and returned it to the holster, steadying his grip on the gun.

"You're a post-mortal!" The Corpsman said in astonishment. "You're the renegade, Berek!"

Berek studied the man desperately for an opportunity to charge him. "You're confused. I've twice been mistaken for the renegade today. A rare case of near identical physio-properties. I'm to report at Identification Center tomorrow for a differential modulation unit."

The Corpsman smiled knowingly; he did not relax his grip on the weapon. "The flux-scope is

never wrong." He patted the recently sheathed instrument. "Besides, the physical description checks: 'Five feet eleven; two hundred pounds; muscular; black hair, brown eyes . . . Face to the wall! Hands outstretched!'"

He accentuated his instructions with flicks of the gun.

Berek complied. In the silence that followed, he knew his captor would be contacting Headquarters with his sub-cranial communicator.

The silence stretched into minutes.

Cautiously, he glanced around. Confusion was on his captor's face, but only for a moment. His features became rigid.

"I have been complimented for the arrest," he said proudly, motioning for Berek to turn around. "The Correctional Corps Commander feels sure this is the first of several that will be made tonight."

"Several?"

"Of course." He laughed. "We simply found you before the others who have been detected in the area."

Hope surged. There were others he might reach! Others who were possibly hunting him—who might tell him about Vella and his memory. He *couldn't* let himself be captured—not now.

He glanced up at the Corpsman,

who was struggling with a holster at his waist, trying to unsheath another instrument. One break was all he needed!

It came.

Clumsily, the Corpsman dropped his gun.

Berek lunged forward, crashing his fist into the man's face.

As the man flailed backward, Berek spun and ran for the exit rectangle at the end of the corridor—in the outer face of the tierage.

A vicious energy beam gouged a crease in the wall on his right as the Corpsman struggled to his knees and tried to aim the weapon. Molten metal cascaded to the floor.

The energy beam crackled again and the wall on Berek's left buckled. But the exit shimmered as he sprinted the final few feet. He dived through, activating his degravitator and beginning his plunge through the night air.

HUNCHED over, Diboar grasped the front edge of the Correctional Corps Commander's desk. "The fool! What happened?"

Lidorn motioned for silence, closed his eyes in concentration.

But Diboar continued. "Didn't you get the instructions to *all* your men?" He swore. "If that man doesn't make the escape look real—

if the post-mortal even suspects . . ."

Lidorn looked up finally. "Berek has escaped." He sighed in relief. Then, apologetically, "It was impossible to contact *every single* Corpsman immediately that the post-mortal was not to be arrested."

"What happened? What did he report?"

"Danor dropped his gun. Berek raced for freedom; made it. Danor fired a couple of wild shots."

"Dropped his gun!" Diboar roared. "Of all the stupid . . . He'll suspect! He'll *know* the escape was staged!"

"No he won't, Sub-Excellency. I'm sure Danor made the incident seem authentic after he learned the arrest was contrary to orders."

Diboar relaxed. "And your men say the couple obviously has no connection with the post-mortals?"

"None at all. But, of course, they will be most thoroughly questioned. . . Meanwhile, the Tracer Squad—that was on the alert outside the tierage reported picking up Berek's trail as soon as he emerged."

"Then make sure you don't lose him!"

"He will not be lost, Excellency," Lidorn promised. "We have a complete physio-file on him. The detection circuits are tuned to the finest degree of resonance and are

being operated at maximum power at full tracer-range of five miles."

"Tell them," the Administrator instructed, "to check anyone who even comes close to him. Although it is apparent now he will not or cannot return to them, it is still possible that others in the movement may try to contact him. If anyone approaches and talks with him, I want them both seized immediately."

OUTSIDE the cavern, the foliage of the natural reservation was a myriad pinpoints of glistening lights in the rays of the early sun.

Vella watched the still sky—devoid of the harsh, upthrust spires of metal that covered practically all the rest of the Earth's surface. Only an occasional public conveyor, almost too high to be discernible, darted by.

There was a rumbling and the rock beside her shifted slowly, opening a cleft where it had lain against another boulder.

Osad stepped out, tiredly squinting against the bright light.

"Tarran will be on his way shortly," he said.

"Do you think he will find Ber-ek?"

"We are waiting for a report on his latest position. Tarran will be equipped with a compact detector.

It may take time, and some stealth, but he should find him without too much trouble."

Vella continued to stare into the sky. "It will be dangerous. Perhaps too dangerous to ask someone like Tarran . . ."

"I would go myself," Osad said reassuringly, "but there's always the slight chance someone would observe my extreme old age. The knowledge that there is a post-mortal as old as I would certainly defeat the plan, or at least seriously affect it. As it is, we will have to risk my detection in a few days."

"I understand," she said reassuringly. "I did not mean you should go. It's just that Tarran . . . well, he's been promised so much! And now he has to face danger before he can realize any of the benefits."

"My dear Vella," there was genuine regret in Osad's voice. "It is unfortunate that another has to face death—self-destruction if capture is imminent—but we all realize that nothing worthwhile has ever been gained without sacrifice . . ."

Osad touched her shoulder gently. "I am going to finish briefing Tarran."

The boulder rolled back to close the cleft after he entered.

With a heavy sigh Vella adjusted her subcutaneous power pack to

a fraction of normal gravity and headed across the reservation, half-swimming, half-bounding in smooth glides.

Fifteen minutes later she had reached the sea of metal buildings surrounding the reservation. She arched swiftly upward, propelling herself with brisk overhand strokes, to the line of public conveyors anchored over the closest domed building. Inside one of the cars, she quickly disconnected the main feed wire for the occupant-identifier, as Berek had taught her and the others to do.

It might take time to find him. And the job of convincing him he must allow himself to be captured, even as she withheld the explanation, would pose an almost insurmountable problem.

But the obstacle of finding him, she had no doubt, would resolve itself in his sentimental nature—the irresistible compulsion she knew he would feel to be near the tierage and other familiar places they had shared together.

She headed eastward — toward Berek.

CHAPTER III

IN the gathering darkness, Berek looked up fearfully to see the form plunging down at him from the dizzy heights above the chasm.

The pursuer was limned against the ever-present rocket-trail display in the sky. He streaked down in a lance-like attitude, but in complete control of his descent.

Horried, Berek raced to the edge of the landing level and dived into the abyss, plunged toward the third level of the building in free fall with his degravitator unused.

But the other, impelled by the force of a much longer dive, gained, closing the gap.

The third level landing was dangerously close now. It rushed up at him with terrifying swiftness as he realized he may have waited too long to eliminate gravity in his drop. Frantically, he drew in a flailing arm and pressed it roughly against the activator plate embedded in the flesh of his side.

His body deprived of weight, the cyclonic wind smote him like a thousand cracking whips, straining his muscles, tearing at his arms, ripping his clothing. But the air resistance braked him and he landed on his feet, fighting the surge of unconsciousness that had come with the sudden deceleration.

He raced to the edge of the level, ready to dive over to a still lower depth.

"I'm no Corpsman!" the man shouted. "I come from—Vella!"

Berek halted. Tense, confused, ready to make an instantaneous

break for freedom, he watched the other land beside him.

"Who are you?" he asked, observing that he wore no uniform.

"A—post-mortal, like yourself."

The man advanced, panting.

Berek started to ask another question, but he caught the glint of light reflected against shining metal in the other's hand—metal that arched up swiftly in a sudden thrust toward his chest.

Startled, he lunged backward, escaped the stab, and brought his fist down hard on the man's wrist. The object flew from his grasp and shattered on the metal surface.

It was a hypodermic syringe.

Surprise and disappointment were on the other's face as he backed away, his eyes flashing their indecision.

But Berek sprang forward, reaching for him.

"It's no lie!" the other shouted. "I come from Vella!"

"With a syringe?"

"I—I can't explain now. I was supposed to inject you so you would be captured by the Corpsmen."

"Vella *wants* me to be captured?"

"You *have* to be captured! But we can't explain why."

Berek grabbed the man roughly by the shoulders. "I want the truth!"

Powerful lights flooded the canyon reflecting against the metal

walls, and the chasm was filled with the reverberating roar of a descending thrust-powered craft.

Confusion transformed the man's features, then terror.

"Corpsmen!" he shouted frantically. "God! It's the Corpsmen!"

He turned and raced for the ledge, dived over. Something soft, gray flew back from his sandal and hit Berek near the corner of his mouth.

It was a loose, granular substance that half-dissolved on his moist lips, leaving a peculiar, gritty taste. He wiped off the matter and raced after the man, plunging into the narrower abyss.

ALMOST together they fell with terrific speed toward the metal surface of the second level. Erratically, the man opened a pocket flap in his tunic and withdrew a small, indiscernible object as he plunged down; forced it into his mouth.

Berek waited until the last second before degravitating and allowing air resistance, reacting against his weightlessness, to break his fall.

But there was no slackening of the other's speed.

"Degravitate!" Berek shouted.

But there was no answer. There was only fear and pain on the other's face as suddenly he seemed to go limp in the final second of his

plunge . . . just before he crashed to his death on the hard surface.

Alighting on the level, Berek looked up as he leaped over the lifeless stranger and raced for the edge of the next chasm. The pursuers who had spilled out of the Correctional Corps craft were diving over the third level.

Berek reached the edge of the landing and dropped over as a brilliant, lethal beam flashed past his shoulder. In his fall, he stayed close to the vertical wall of the building and out of sight of the Corpsmen.

The ledge of the first sub-level was narrow, and as he raced to the edge to plunge into the lesser canyon he was not exposed to their fire.

He went down past another sub-level and another—like an infinitesimal human tumbling down stairs of giant proportions.

Suddenly he was at the bottom! There were no more ledges to dive over! There was no more speed to be gained by plunging at full gravity!

He raced along the chasm—now so narrow that he could almost spread his arms and touch both walls. But his foot contacted a metal protuberance and rationality calmed his frenzied actions as he recognized the switch which would open an emergency entrance to one

of the subterranean pneumatic freight tubes.

Even as he recognized the device, he activated it and leaped through the opening trapdoor. The aperture closed behind him, but soon his eyes became accustomed to the dim fluorescence of the smooth, cylindrical wall.

Degravitating, he swam frantically down the tube, trying to recall the frequency with which ponderous freight capsules went racing along the pneumatic passageways.

Twenty minutes later, after he had alternated between the two swiftest strokes he knew, he saw the faint red glimmer ahead of the next emergency exit.

But suddenly it was difficult to breathe and there was a roaring in his ears. *The tube was sucking a capsule forward at tremendous speed!*

If the low pressure on the destination side of the projectile did not suffocate him, he would be smashed against the blunt, metal nose of the massive piston!

MOONLIGHT shone through the wall of the Correctional Corps Commander's office, challenging the subdued lighting of the room.

Fidgeting with articles on the desk, Lidorn was apprehensively silent as he watched Diboar pacing

in front of him.

The Zonal Administrator stopped and stared at Lidorn angrily. "How *could* your men allow the fugitives to escape when they knew the value we placed on them? They had orders to make the arrest as soon as there was an attempted contact."

"I haven't the full report yet, sir," Lidorn apologized. "We only received the initial information a few minutes ago."

"And the one who tried to contact Berek is definitely dead?"

"He killed himself."

"Have you identified him?"

"Not yet, Excellency. During his brief exposure to the physio-detectors, however, it was established he is not a death fugitive. But we suspect he will check out as being among the predeath age missing."

Diboar resumed pacing. "Three fugitives within our grasp in the short space of two hours!" he muttered disconsolately. "Two escape and one kills himself before we can wring any information from him."

"Oh," Lidorn's tone was more encouraging. "I don't believe we can say the third escaped. I received a report only a short while ago that the tracer circuits have re-established their fix. It should be only a matter of minutes before her capture is reported."

"Her capture? You have identified the third fugitive?"

"She is post-mortal. Her designation is Vella AX40P23."

The Administrator's face was unchanged in its rigid expression. "Another post-mortal! The fact that she is a woman will make no difference. She should prove just as useful in demonstrating the official attitude that will be shown to all death renegades."

A Correctional Corps craft dropped toward the landing level, close to the office wall. The two men watched it land.

"About the one who killed himself," Lidorn said. "There's something else you should know . . . Some queer material was discovered on the bottom of his sandals. At first inspection it appeared to be some sort of sludge from one of the transmutational factories."

Diboar's face relaxed into a smile. "Then we may still be able to trace where he came from!"

"A complete analysis has already been ordered. Specimens are on their way to the closest laboratory for study."

One of the Corpsmen who had left the recently arrived ship stepped through the admit area of the office's outer wall.

"We have the woman," he announced, standing stiffly in front of Lidorn's desk.

CHAPTER IV

The Commander glanced at Diboar, exhibited a boasting smile.

The Administrator spun the Corpsman around by his shoulder. "Where is she?"

"In the detention compartment of the squad car, Excellency. We made the arrest in the vicinity of Tierage R-244."

But even before the Corpsman had finished answering, Diboar had rushed through the exit rectangle and was striding toward the craft. The Commander and his subordinate followed.

"Lidorn," the Administrator called over his shoulder as he neared the vehicle. "I'll want you to alert the psycho-technicians immediately. Have them make preparations for memory scanning."

He drew up at the rear of the craft. "Open this thing."

The Corpsman advanced and, as a panel slid open, sprang in.

His hoarse shout sounded immediately. "She's not here!"

Swearing, Diboar looked in. Only the Corpsman was there, spreading his hands awkwardly before him, as though feeling for something he couldn't see. Then, dazed, he leaped out.

"But it's impossible!" he exclaimed. "I put her in there myself! There was no way she could have escaped!"

BEREK looked frantically over his shoulder. The dim light in the pneuma-tube traced the split-second appearance and onrush of the freight capsule—first as an almost indiscernible dot, then as a ponderous bulk that bore down on him with crushing force as the tortured wind screamed in protest.

He did not know at which point unconsciousness came.

But awareness returned! Awareness with a sense of intense pressure forcing down on him from all sides and the sensation of insane, wrenching motion.

Fighting nausea, Berek thrashed out with his arms and legs to restore his equilibrium. Finally he managed to maneuver his body into an attitude parallel with the tube.

He looked behind and ahead of him. The capsule was not in sight! The wall of the tube was indistinct in a blur of relative motion. He was streaking through the freight passageway at tremendous speed!

A red light zipped by overhead. Another. And another. He recognized them as the exit markers spaced at three-mile intervals.

Dumbfounded, he tried to guess what had happened as his speed decreased and the lights began to flicker by less rapidly. It was as

though the metal hull of the capsule and the freight it contained had passed *through* his body!

Was it possible that there were new capsules of metal capable of artificial polarization to allow passage of a body in case someone should be trapped in the tube?

The next red light came slowly enough for him to reach out and grab the stanchion in the recess as he floated by. His trembling fingers found the trapdoor switch and he propelled himself out into the chasm.

He recognized the section immediately. Slim, pylon-like buildings reared like upthrust needles, each featuring the architectural characteristics of the food transmutational laboratory area. A glance at the position grids in the night sky verified his location. But it was nearly a thousand miles from where he had entered the tube!

A thousand miles from the region where all station receptors were on the double alert for the presence of his characteristics!

Swimming over to the wall where he could lie concealed in the shadow, he dropped to the surface and sat breathing heavily. There was still the gritty taste on his lips where he had been struck by the material from the sandal of the man who had killed himself.

Trying to categorize the taste,

he frowned. Then abruptly he remembered that once he had made a trip to one of the natural reservations. He had tasted something similar there—mud.

Berek was instantly alert. There was no mud anywhere on this planet of steel except at the natural reservations! That meant the man had only recently been at one of the areas which had been saved from the inexorable spread of metal over the entire surface!

He dredged his memory for information on the reservations, tried to think of the twenty-three areas in their numerical order. But for some reason his mind leaped ahead to Number Thirteen. He concentrated on that one.

It was the closest, but it wasn't only its nearness that seemed to have an hypnotic attraction. There was some other inscrutable factor drawing him there—perhaps, he hoped, something from deep within his lost memory.

FIRST she was not there. Then she was there again. For Vella it was as simple as that. But after the experience, she sat dazedly on the floor of the squad car's detention compartment, the poison capsule clasped in her trembling fist.

That the process had started would ordinarily have been cause

for jubilation. But she felt no exuberance now. Horrified, she opened her hand and looked down at the white powder of death, enclosed in its transparent, brittle case which would shatter like thin glass under the pressure of her teeth.

And she wondered how long she should allow herself to live. Most of the other post-mortals under the same circumstances would have taken their lives immediately upon capture. She had already imagined she would too.

But the consummation of their plan was so near! If only she could see Berek once more! Grimly, she realized that was an unattainable hope. She would *never* see him again. And, even if he should appear suddenly out of nowhere to comfort her, she would not be able to look to him for advice, for it would take hours of explanation merely to tell him why she must die.

Quietly, she began to sob, swaying back and forth. Then, suddenly finding resolution where there had been none before, she raised the capsule toward her mouth.

But she stiffened as she realized the door to the compartment was open! She was aware of a gruff voice outside. With the blunt end of the capsule touching her lips, she listened:

"... Just outwitted you, that's all!"

Another voice rose in defense. "But she couldn't have escaped! Perhaps she killed herself—like the one who attempted to contact the first renegade!"

Then Tarran had tried and failed! Limply, she let the hand with the pill of death fall to her side.

"Killed herself indeed! And disposed of her own body—all within the confines of that compartment?"

And they had already noticed the empty detention cell! Perhaps there was still a chance she could get away!

The original voice rose to a higher pitch. "Lidorn, I want you to suspend every other activity in this zone. Concentrate only on finding Berek and the woman. Triple the number of Corpsmen assigned to the detail."

"You want him brought in too?"

"As soon as possible. We shall have to be satisfied with one, or possibly two captives. I suspect the Council is beginning to frown on our failing plan to set a trap for the others. They are growing impatient for an execution to demonstrate that the situation is not out of hand. We shall have to be content with whatever information we can extract from the minds

of the man and woman—"

Approaching footsteps.

Vella listened to a new voice:

"We have received another report from the squad that witnessed the suicide, Sub-Excellency. The corporal suspects that the substance from the sandals may be . . . mud."

"Mud? Mud?"

"Yes. Earth; soil; land. A mixture of natural compounds that sustains plant life, vegetation."

"Oh." There was comprehension in the voice of the one with authority. "Found on the surface of natural reservations?"

"Yes. And there is something else of grave importance that may perhaps guide us in future attempts to arrest the post-mortals: This one did not die from the fall! He killed himself with a poison which he must have swallowed when he saw his capture was unavoidable. It is not too illogical to assume that other renegades are similarly instructed to prevent their being taken alive."

"You hear that, do you not, Lidorn? Arrests, henceforth, must be a complete surprise. There must be no chase. Capture must be totally unexpected in each individual case until we are sure we have cornered all of them."

There was silence for a moment, then came the sound of hurried,

withdrawing footsteps. "Have your men bring specimens in," the commanding voice came from a distance. "I'll order a complete analysis. We'll pinpoint the reservation."

Vella hazarded a glance out of the compartment. Three men who had been at the side of the craft were walking off slowly behind the one who had given the orders.

She waited a few minutes. Then she placed the capsule back in her pocket and darted from the compartment, slipping into the cab of the squad car.

At the nearest conveyor station, she abandoned the official craft and swam over to a public vehicle, disengaging its occupant-identifier.

Two squad cars streaked skyward from the shadowy surface. But, refusing to become panicky, she calmly steered the craft onto one of the crowded flight lanes.

At another station fifty miles away she transferred to a third vehicle and continued on her purposefully devious route toward the reservation.

BEREK left the commandeered air-car at the domed station near the edge of the reservation and propelled himself down—over the thick foliage and toward the center of the area.

Cautiously, he checked behind

him, then all around. He was not being observed. He stretched his almost weightless body into an inclined attitude and hurried toward the thick clump of trees near the center of the area.

Abruptly he wondered why he was heading for the midpoint of the reservation. Was it because there was the logical place to begin the search? Or was it because something deeper than conscious intent was drawing him to the odd formation of bare rocks?

It was almost as though he had been in this reservation before—not once, but many times. To his left should be a grassy plain with a small artificial stream dividing it and separating into two rivulets before entering the wooded section. Even before he looked he knew it would be there.

Suddenly elated, he considered the possibility that soon he would be among others like him—soon he would know what it was that made them fear and resist death—what had happened to Vella—perhaps even why he had no memory.

He swooped low over the trees in a descending arc and straightened his body vertically to brake himself only a foot off the ground. Then he restored full weight and dropped the remaining distance.

For a moment he stood still, surveying the natural beauty

around him and wondering whether the impression of familiarity had a foundation in fact. Somewhere in the distance a night bird sang shrill notes and a light wind rustled the leaves.

He had seen scenes like this before—on the screens of the interstellar viewers. He remembered now there were entire planets—countless thousands of them—without a single building; with nothing but trees and other vegetation and small, rapidly moving animals and beautiful rocks and other things once called flowers.

Even at this moment those scenes were actually in existence. For the medium through which they were reproduced on the screen was not light. But it was different here! He wasn't merely looking at the scene. He was part of it!

Restraining his eagerness, he approached the rock formation. Now it was as though he were not directing his own movements; as though his legs and arms responded to reflex actions established in the habits of a quarter of a century.

His hand reached out to a small fissure in the rock. He had no idea what he would find there. But as soon as his fingers encountered the lever, it was as though he had been aware all along it was what he sought. He could almost envision

what would happen when he moved the small metal bar . . .

SHAKING his head solicitously, Osad walked back and forth before the heat coils in the wall of the cavern.

"Alarn, Crozar," he called suddenly.

The men left the group at the other end of the chamber and hurried over.

"Are we ready to move?" he asked.

"Everything is packed and set for loading," said Alarn.

"Everybody knows what's happened?"

"They all know Vella has disappeared and Tarran has not reported back from his attempt to contact Berek."

"You've told them that either Vella or Tarran may have been captured and may possibly have been prevented from killing themselves before being submitted to the memory scanners?"

"They are all well aware, Osad," Alarn assured, "that at any moment the Corps may descend on us."

Osad sighed. "They won't be as comfortable in the new place."

"They know that," said Crozar. "But they're used to sacrifices."

"We're definitely going to the new location?" Alarn asked.

Osad spread his hands helplessly. "We'll leave within an hour if Vella and Tarran are not back by then."

The two younger men were thoughtfully silent.

"Why did she have to ignore my warning and go?" Osad asked bitterly. "She knew how vulnerable she is! She knew that if she were captured and prevented from committing suicide they would be able to draw every bit of information they need from her!"

"Do you suppose she actually has been arrested?" Crozar asked.

"I scarcely have any doubt now. If either she or Tarran were still free, they would realize we would fear they had been captured. And they would know we would have to withdraw to another hiding place, abandoning them completely."

"Then," Alarn suggested, "we'd better leave now."

Osad nodded in mute assent, walking down the passage toward the hidden exit. The two men followed.

Crozar frowned deeply. "If either one of them has gone to the psycho-lab," he observed sullenly, "that would mean the end of the movement."

Osad nodded. "They would then know the nature of the renegades. And they would know how to fight us. They would see that publicity,

such as would come with spectacular executions, is our immediate aim. And they'd deprive us of that advantage."

They arrived at the end of the passage and Osad drew up before the huge, movable boulder that served as the door to the cavern. He threw the lever to open the hidden exit.

The rock swung aside to reveal a startled man standing at the entrance, moonlight bathing his tense features.

BEREK glanced only casually at the two younger men, then stared at the emaciated one with the wrinkled face and thin, drooping shoulders. He had never seen such an individual before. Or had he?

"It's Berek!" one of the younger men gasped.

"He's found his way back!" moaned the wrinkled one.

Berek was confounded.

"Seize him!" shrieked the lean, weak one.

"But—" protested one of the young men.

"Seize him!" the order was repeated in a shriller tone.

The one on the left lunged for Berek. Confused, Berek backed away. The man grasped his arm and tried to twist it around behind him. Berek shook him off but then he was being attacked

from both sides.

Berek lashed out with his fist. It landed on the chest of one man and he flailed backward.

"Don't let him get away!" the wrinkled man shouted. "We've got to give him the injection!"

Berek recalled that someone else had tried to inject him — *so he could be captured by the Corpsmen!*

A hand caught Berek's shoulder and whirled him around. He didn't see the blow land. As he collapsed unconscious, Osad whirled to run hurriedly into the cavern.

In less than a minute he was back with a hypodermic syringe. He plunged the needle into Berek's arm while Alarn and Crozar watched and others spilled out of the mouth of the underground quarters.

"Hurry! Hurry!" Osad corraled them back inside. "The Corpsmen can be only minutes away! They may be surrounding us even now!"

He turned to Crozar. "Get some of the men and bring in aircars."

"What about Berek?" Crozar asked.

"Leave him there where they can find him. There'll be a temporary partial paralysis, but he'll be all right. At least, he won't be able to flee from the Corpsmen for a few hours."

CHAPTER V

THERE were times when Diboar had had hair to run his fingers through in desperation. For that reason, he was unconsciously running them over his slick scalp now as he stood looking through the transparent outer wall of his office. The shadows of the tallest spires stretched at length in the morning sunlight.

"So now you've been outsmarted by a woman!" he muttered without looking back at Lidorn who stood uneasily in the center of the room.

"I can't understand how she did it," Lidorn was sweating.

"I can," Diboar said caustically, turning. "They've found some way of duplicating the set of physio-characteristics to which the squad cars' detention compartments are tuned."

"But how—where was she—"

"When your men came in to report they had captured her, she simply slipped out of the compartment and went around to the control cabin. After we left to return to your office, she made off with the craft."

"Of course, Excellency!" Lidorn agreed enthusiastically. "How else? Have you any suggestions where she might be now?"

"Perhaps. She may have suc-

ceeded in contacting Berek and taken him back to join the other post-mortals."

He went back to his desk and spoke into a perforated silver disk on a thin stand. "Any word from research yet?"

"They're sending a report now, Excellency," a voice from the disk answered.

He turned to Lidorn. "Alert your raiders. I feel sure that we shall soon have not only Vella and Berek, but all the other renegades."

The Correctional Corps Commander lapsed into the intense concentration required to utilize his subcranial communicator.

"I have fifteen squads ready," Lidorn, announced after a while.

"Sufficiently armed with stun-guns?"

Before he could answer, the light above the admit panel of the wall glowed and Diboar stepped within the range required for his bio-electric characteristics to activate the polarization circuit. The area glowed and a man in the gray tunic of the Research Division stepped through.

"You have the report on the mud analysis?" Diboar demanded.

"Yes, Excellency. The specimen came from Reservation Thirteen."

The Administrator strode toward

the exit area.

"Have the lead squad pick us up on the apron," he called back to Lidorn. "Alert the two Corps stations closest to the reservation and have them ring it in with every available weapon."

THE small public conveyor swooped low over Natural Reservation Thirteen, its silvery surface a mirror that drew suffused rays of the mid-morning sun against the dark foliage that slipped by underneath.

It braked and a small, lithe figure dived out over its side. Then, on automatic control, it continued on, unoccupied, swerving upward and heading aimlessly toward the west.

Vella relinquished some of her weightlessness to gain speed in her plunge toward the ground. Would she be too late? Had she wasted too much time in making certain she had eluded her pursuers? Would Osad and the others be gone—gone to a new hiding place where she would never be able to find them and would have to remain... alone?

Suppressing her fear and impatience, she dropped to the ground in front of the movable boulder that hid the cleft in the rock. With a trembling hand, she threw the lever and raced into the dark pas-

sageway.

But she stopped, suddenly apprehensive, and listened. It was strangely quiet in the cavern—quiet and dark. And there should have been sounds—the quiet noise of machinery that purified air and provided heat and light, the ever-present murmur of subdued voices.

They were gone! She was alone—deserted!

Uncertainty and consternation smothered her as she backed from the passageway and into the sunlight.

A half-moan! Behind her. There—under the tree close to the entrance!

Cautiously, she advanced on the prostrate form that turned a face toward her.

It was Berek!

"VELLA!" he whispered as he squinted to recognize the dark-haired girl.

Again he tried to struggle to his feet. But his legs were lifeless and even the thought of attempting to move them sent lances of fire racing down the nerve fibres in each limb.

"Oh, Berek!" she sobbed.

Then she raced forward and threw herself on him, pressing her face close to his.

"You—you're all right!" he exclaimed jubilantly. "The man

wasn't lying! You escaped mandatory death too!

He kissed her—for the first time in a quarter of a century, he was sure—and in the impassioned embrace he forgot even his lost memory.

But she pulled away suddenly.

"Oh, Berek!" she sobbed. "I must go. The Corps will be here any minute! That's why Osad left you here—like this. They knew you'd be found!"

He held her wrist firmly, preventing her from rising. "The others?" he demanded urgently; "You know about the others? You are one of them?"

She struggled to free herself, but he only tightened his grip.

"It's all right if they find you," she begged. "But I—I've got to get away!"

"Why is it all right if they capture me?" he asked, puzzled, hurt. "They'll kill me, you know."

"But of course . . ." she cut herself off abruptly.

"Of course!" he repeated incredulously. "You say that as though it made no difference—as though you even wished I would be captured! Who are the renegades, Vella? What . . ."

"You must be captured, Berek," she interrupted. "But I've got to escape! Don't you understand? You've got to let me go!"

As though she had slapped him in the face, he recoiled. Could this be Vella? Could this be the girl who had shared his life for centuries?

He tried to fathom the expressions that raced across her face; tried to understand the terror in her eyes as she glanced frantically into the sky over her shoulder. But all the while he held her wrist firmly.

"You want me to die?" he demanded again, unbelievably.

She looked guiltily at the ground. "Yes." Still, it was as though she had forced herself to say it—perhaps as a ruse to secure her release.

He clamped his teeth together. "I will not let you go! You will stay and tell me who the post-mortals are; what their purpose is. You know, Vella. You have been with them."

She bit her lips and tears formed in her eyes.

"Why must I be captured? If I am a post-mortal, why have they turned me loose without a memory and let me flounder around to be taken by the Corpsmen? Why did they paralyze me so I could flee no longer?"

She looked away.

It was true. It was as though she were not his wife at all—as though all the centuries they had

spent together had spawned ultimately only hate in her heart for him—intense hate.

"Please let me go!" She gave no indication that she would answer the questions.

His love melted to resentment, bowed before his determination. "You're going to tell me!" Angrily, he tightened his grip on her arm.

"The renegades," she gasped, "are—friends. People with whom we've worked for a quarter of a century."

"Friends!" He laughed sarcastically. "Friends who want to see me go to the death chamber! Why do I fear death, Vella? What happened to my conditioning to accept mandatory death?"

She remained silent.

He caught her shoulder tenderly. "Tell me, darling," he pleaded. "Then we'll go away by ourselves! We'll find some place where we can hide — from the Corpsmen and the other post-mortals."

FEAR leaped back into her eyes as she scanned the sky again.

Then she tried desperately to wrench her hand from his grasp.

But he held on firmly.

"Osad was right," she said bitterly. "It would have been better had I not seen you at all."

"You *know* I must die and you'd

rather not even see me?" He swallowed hard.

She avoided looking in his face for a moment. But suddenly she turned eagerly toward him.

"Oh, Berek! If only there was some way I could make you understand that this is as it must be!"

"This whole series of events—everything that is happening to you—was planned partly by *you yourself!* Your missing memory was part of the plan—even your insistence that nothing could be explained to you!"

She sobbed. "Oh, darling! If only you had agreed to let someone else go instead! But you insisted that no one except yourself should be made to suffer."

Vella sighed heavily. "Don't you see that what is happening now is part of a magnificent plot to overthrow a complete social system—to end their brutal mandatory death scheme? If we told you what the plan is, the psycho-technicians might draw it from you. Then they would know how to fight it."

It was another trick—a convenient false explanation to throw him off guard so she could break free.

"They might capture you and draw the plan from *you*," he offered, smiling wryly. "You know the plan, don't you?"

"That's why you've got to let

me go!" she insisted.

"And," he persisted with his argument, "you've just informed me there is such a plot. They can learn that much from me in the psycho-laboratory."

"They already know, simply from the nature of our operation, that we are fighting mandatory death. They can't conceive of a plan that might overthrow the system. So, if they don't know what it is, they'll only laugh it off and execute us as they find us."

Frustrated, he let his breath hiss out through taut lips.

"I suppose," she began hesitatingly, "I can tell you this much: It is part of the plan that, just before your death, you will have your memory restored. Only then will you know all."

He swore in dismay.

She placed her free arm around his waist and rested her head on his shoulder, sobbing softly. "Darling, there is so much to gain! Unrestricted life for everyone. If it wouldn't be for the conditioning all are under to accept mandatory death, it would be simple to arouse them and enlist their help in fighting the government.

"But it is the government we must overcome — the government that will resist to the end any movement which would overthrow the system or remove all of human-

ity from their selfish control."

Confusion was a flood that engulfed him. Both her arms were around his waist now. He grasped her tenderly, possessively, around the shoulders.

But abruptly she recoiled from his light, caressing grip and rolled over swiftly on the ground to remove herself from his grasping hands.

"You tricked me! You—"

"I had to do it, darling." She backed away, looking at him longingly as she entered the shadows of the dense trees. "I had to get away! You don't—can't understand."

He struggled frantically to rise and follow. But the excruciations in his lower spine and legs gripped him like razor-sharp talons. He groaned and fell back.

There were tears on her face as she turned suddenly in the dense shadows and pressed a hand against her side, activating her degravitator. Then she was swimming hurriedly away between the stout boles of the forest.

Five minutes later, he was still staring vacantly in the direction in which she had gone.

Another minute passed and he jerked his head around in time to see the two Corpsmen lunge from behind a rock.

One of them raised a weapon and

pointed it in front of him as he ran.

"Watch his hand!" cried the other. "Watch for the capsule!"

A score of Corpsmen closed in from his left and right, all with weapons leveled at him.

He tried to squirm away from them, raised a trembling hand to his face.

The muzzles of a half-dozen stunguns belched cones of light simultaneously.

CHAPTER VI

THE large room was musty, its walls of masonry cracked and crumbling, its floor a surface of fine dust mixed with soil in a silt-like consistency.

At one end of the compartment, scores slept on crude pallets, lounged on ancient chairs, or congregated about rickety tables in grim silence.

His sandaled feet kicking up small swirls of dust, Osad paced at the other end, unaware of the expectant stares of those whose faces were turned in his direction.

Drawing his thin hand into tight fists, he sighed disconcertedly and turned to step under what once had been an arch and walk out into the more depressive gloom of the area outside the concealed room.

In the meager light he surveyed the grotesque masses of jagged forms and shapes that comprised the bizarre surface; the solid metal ceiling fifty feet overhead, supported by ponderous columns.

Existence in the cavern had been depressing enough. And, before they had been forced by the pressure of near detection to flee to quarters in underground regions, they had enjoyed the relatively normal occupancy of an abandoned warehouse.

But this—this subsurface region of squalid structures that had deteriorated into crumbling ruins even before the dawn of recorded history—was certainly the nadir of degradation for the post-mortals.

It was an unreasonable imposition, he told himself, that he should expect them to experience such utter decadence. Better that he had not deconditioned them at all; had not defeated their instilled compulsion to accept, welcome, mandatory death at eight hundred years; had not stolen them away from the maw of the disposal chamber.

Alarn came out and stood silently by his side.

A section of the ceiling almost directly above them scintillated and a large, muscular man dropped through the glowing metal, falling at hectic speed to land next to them.

"The Corps!" he gasped. "They are all around outside! There're hundreds of squad cars and—"

Osad stiffened, grasped the man's arms. "Did they follow you, Felir?" he demanded. "Did they see you?"

"They saw me, but I eluded them . . . I think. But Macan! They got him with a stungun. I knew I wouldn't be able to carry him to safety." He sank to a boulder and lowered his face in his hands. "I had to kill him so they wouldn't take him," he said remorsefully.

Alarn and Osad were respectfully silent.

"They were outside when you came?" Osad asked.

The man nodded. "But we had to get through—with the news you have been waiting for . . . Berek! He's been taken! The Administrator released the news publicly only minutes ago."

"Berek captured?" Osad started.

"He was taken at the reservation." Felir lowered his voice solemnly. "And Tarran was killed when he tried to contact Berek. They told about that too."

"Vella?" Osad asked excitedly. "Did they say anything about her?"

"Nothing. Perhaps she is still free."

Alarn frowned; turned to Osad,

"You've got to let me find her."

Osad shook his head. "Where would you look? Certainly she would be nowhere near the reservation. Anyway, we cannot take the chance of having one of us detected in an operation that isn't vital to the movement."

"But, suppose she is captured?"

"We can only hope she will have the presence of mind to use the capsule."

Osad lowered himself onto the hard surface of a dusty boulder and sat with his head bowed.

"You're going to get Berek now?" Alarn asked.

"No. We will have to wait until tonight to insure that he will have been examined at the psycholaboratory before we attempt to restore his memory."

"What about the squad cars?" Alarn asked. "Shall I go out to see what they are doing?"

"No one is to leave!" Osad ordered.

Felir rose, clenched his fists despairingly. "How did they know we were here?"

"It was bound to happen sometime," Osad sighed.

"But will they trace us? Will they locate us through all the metal of the buildings?"

Osad's shoulders sagged and he looked down at his hands. "We can only wait and see."

VELLA stumbled on through the wooded section, not using her degravitator so she would remain as close to the ground as possible.

She had seen one of the Correctional Corps squad cars creep by low over the tree-tops and she had timed the approximate moment of Berek's subsequent capture. It was then she began doubting seriously she would be able to avoid capture much longer.

If only she knew where the post-mortals had gone!

Certainly there would be scores of squad cars surrounding the reservation, waiting to detect possible straggler-renegades. Occasionally, she had pushed up to a level with the tree-tops in the early-afternoon sunlight and had observed the frantic activity by Corpsmen around the entrance to the cavern.

When she had last checked visually, almost two hours ago, she had seen the uniformed men invade the wooded section that stretched from the center of the area to the northern rim. Others, using flippers and cumbersome detection headgears, had fanned out radially from the cavern entrance, skimming low over the foliage.

She tripped over an exposed root and sprawled on the ground, crying out in pain. When she rose, there

was a gash in the instep of her sandaled foot and blood trickled out to leave little droplets on the ground in the wake of her step.

Ignoring the pain, she degravitated partly and limped on.

Another ship slipped by overhead and she flattened herself against a tree trunk instinctively.

Would she find Osad and the others at another reservation? Their last three moves had been from natural area to natural area. But no. She remembered hearing Osad say their new refuge would unfortunately be a totally different place.

Suddenly she was bitter over the secrecy that the post-mortals imposed even on their own members with regard to subsequent hiding places. True, it was necessary to protect the group in the event that one was captured. But she was different! She had been one of the original post-mortals.

Vella tripped again and fell roughly to the ground. She lay there panting, wishing forlornly that she were one of the extinct lesser animals that could find safety by boring into the ground.

In the whole confusing, frightening set of circumstances, there was only one meager hope—that Berek's capture and subsequent execution would soon end the plight of all the post-mortals and bring

about her salvation before she could be cornered by the Corps.

Suddenly she shrank from the unnatural silence all around her. Even the leaves were tensely still in the absence of the almost ever-present wind. She struggled to her feet and stood rigid, listening.

It was as though a thousand unseen eyes in the forest were focused on her, watching her every move. Even now, a score of Corpsmen might be observing her, stalking her—waiting until they could take her by complete surprise and thereby prevent her suicide.

No ships had passed over for almost fifteen minutes. Was it that they were affording her a false sense of security, a conviction of successful escape?

They would do that, she realized, in order to get close enough so they could thwart any attempt to bring the capsule to her mouth.

With an unsteady hand, she drew the pill from her clothes; stiffened, expecting a Corpsman to leap from behind each tree and rush at her.

But nothing happened.

Keeping the capsule in her hand, she started forward again.

A sound ahead! An almost gentle snapping of twigs and rustling of leaves—as though a ponderous metal hull had nestled too deep, within the tree-tops seeking con-

cealment.

Frantically, she turned and raced the other way, clutching the pill desperately, yet with a sense of revulsion.

A twig snapped ahead.

She drew to an abrupt stop, fighting for breath, searching the shadowy realm beneath the dense trees.

She turned and lunged in the other direction.

A Corpsman stepped out from the tree immediately ahead. She screamed and rammed the lethal pill into her mouth.

A stungun exploded in her face.

As she fell limply to the ground; she maneuvered the brittle capsule between her teeth.

A volley of paralyzing flashes from all directions bathed her body.

She tried to bite down.

But there was no strength in her jaw.

The sound of excited male voices blended into a meaningless, diminishing hum like a swarm of retreating insects as the effects of the rays blanketed her senses.

Then, vaguely, she felt fingers being pressed into her mouth.

“THIRTY more squads to the K-42 Sector! Break out the heavy penetration-detection equipment! Clear everyone out of the

area except Corpsmen and authorized personnel! Fifty years premature retirement to the squad that finds the post-mortals!"

It was Diboar roaring his orders into the pickup on his desk.

He leaned back in his chair, smiling, and touched his extended fingers together complacently in front of his chest. He glanced up at Lidorn.

"Have you sealed off the penumbras in the area?"

"Yes, Excellency. All intersector shipments are being rerouted."

"The portable bio-trace detector—has it been dispatched?"

"It has just left. They should at this moment be preparing to set it in operation at the site where the one post-mortal killed the other."

"What sort of results can we expect?" Diboar leaned back in the chair:

"It will lose no time getting on the track of the one who escaped." Lidorn shrugged. "Of course, it may branch off on a few false tangents, but the evidence of the renegade's escape route is irrevocably there. Within hours it will find him, no matter where he has fled in the isolated area."

Diboar turned to stare through the transparent wall and study the late afternoon shadows cast by the

myriad spires and domes. "Where would you say they are hiding?" he asked pensively.

"Perhaps in one of the storage buildings. There are several abandoned ones in that section."

"I should think not," Diboar said thoughtfully. "I say they are not in any of the buildings."

Lidorn started. "Not in *any* of the buildings? But then—where?"

"I seem to remember having acquired the knowledge that K-42 was one of the last areas to be covered when the cities of steel spread out over the entire continent. In that region, I understand, one may, by boring through the base surface, find himself in a cleared, ruin-filled area extending some fifty feet or so down to the original surface of the continent.

"I rather imagine it is there we shall find the post-mortals."

"A possibility," Lidorn agreed respectfully. "But I think it's improbable that—"

Diboar, staring through him, went on as though he hadn't been interrupted. "Therefore I want at least three hundred Corpsmen to descend into the subsurface region at points which I shall designate. These points will comprise a perimeter circumscribing the suspect area. They will cover and search the ruins, converging at a common center."

"But, Excellency!" Lidorn protested. "You can't expect my men to grovel in the filth of—"

"They will be equipped with short-range detectors." Diboar's voice was crisp. "And they will be armed with both lethal weapons and stunguns."

"It makes no difference if some post-mortals are killed?"

"Not particularly. Not as long as we take a representative number of them for forced questioning and public execution. The System Council has decided that enforced death for all renegades will be so painful that no one, not even if they had never been conditioned to desire death at eight hundred, will risk joining another group of renegades."

Diboar rose suddenly. "Berek and the woman—are they ready for the psycho-laboratory?"

"All is prepared. The woman has been taken there already . . . You will witness the examination?"

"I had intended to. But now that we have the others trapped, getting information out of this pair does not bear the same relative importance. I'll watch for a while, though—until it is time for me to go before the night session of the Council with the petition for execution."

He walked toward the wall and the exit area glimmered, its sub-

molecular units rearranging themselves to permit passage.

"Order the subsurface search," the Administrator instructed. "Then get a guard detachment and meet me in fifteen minutes at the Detention Quarters."

CHAPTER VII

WITH gleaming laboratory equipment meticulously arranged all about her, Vella sat trembling in the chair at the center of the large room.

A technician placed an instrument next to her head.

"Psycho-index two-oh-four-point-one," he called out.

"Two-oh-four-point-one," repeated another white uniformed man seated at the control console that almost completely occupied one of two identical recesses in one wall of the laboratory.

Besides the twin control consoles, there were also identical metal tables in each recess, equipped with arm, leg and head manacles.

The technician selected from his kit a wire loop that trailed twin leads to another meter. He held it around Vella's head as though it were a halo.

"Indicated capacity . . . point-oh-oh-seven libidofarads," he announced.

The echo from the recess as an-

other adjustment was made at the console.

All around her, the glistening coils and tubes and purring dynamos and chattering transformers were cold, impersonal, but living forces that pressed in on her with stifling intent—a vivid contrast to the simplicity of the cavern walls which had been, until only recently, her only natural environment.

"Emotional overload circuit limit—twenty-three-point-nine." The technician read the figure from a third instrument pressed against her forehead.

Vella was hardly conscious of the echo this time.

Instead, her eyes were focused on the auxiliary stand next to the table in the nearest recess. It offered the only hope to avoid betraying the post-mortal movement. For, on the stand's surface was a thin, surgical instrument, its sharp, pointed blade shining in the flickering lights atop the control console.

Hastily, she withdrew her gaze and glanced at the two Corpsmen, stationed on either side of the admit area, to see whether they had observed her in the act of discovering the weapon.

A lightning dash into the recess and she could seize the knife before the guards could move.

Then the secret of the post-mor-

tals would die with her.

The instrument had an hypnotic attraction, but she forced her eyes to the floor.

"There," announced the man at the console. "It's all ready."

Her hand crept stealthily to the subcutaneous degravitator in her side. She reduced her weight to a mere few pounds—ready for the lance-like spring that would take her to the knife.

The entrance area abruptly came to life with a pulsating glow.

Both Corpsmen turned to observe the awaited newcomers.

Now would be her last chance!

Vella dived from the chair, her almost weightless body streaking parallel with the floor, her arms stretched toward the stand with the knife.

THE cell's admit area fluoresced, and Berek rose to stand uncertainly in the center of the compartment, waiting. His legs were unsteady, but mostly from the effects of the injection administered by the post-mortals.

First, four Corpsmen entered and stood on either side of the glimmering area.

Next came Diboar, the Zonal Administrator, who had only recently stood gloating in the cell, surveying him.

The last to enter was the Cor-

rectional Corps Commander, Li-dorn.

"Do you still insist you can remember nothing about the other renegades?" Diboar asked.

"I know nothing," Berek answered defiantly.

The Administrator approached, stood before him. "Why are there citizens who fear death, Berek—mad individuals who can counteract a lifetime of conditioning to accept mandatory death; can decondition others similarly?"

Why? Berek asked himself grievously.

"Why do you fear death, man?"

That question he could answer. He had discovered the answer during his seemingly interminable flight from his pursuers.

"Because the desire for death is not natural. People want to die only because they are forced to, psychologically. Let alone, with their instincts unaffected, they would be terrified at the idea of the disposal chamber."

"Who is responsible for your deconditioning? What is the purpose behind it?"

Berek was helplessly silent.

Diboar's voice softened somewhat as he used a square of linen to wipe small beads of moisture from the naked top of his head.

"Berek, do you realize that it is impossible to accommodate another

billion persons in the System? Don't you know that already our transmutational laboratories are working at the limit of safety? That all piles are balanced a hair's breadth below critical mass? That under no conditions would it be possible to increase our output to sustain, at the current standards, even a handful more persons?"

"I told you I know nothing about the renegades," Berek insisted impatiently.

"Do you suppose," the Administrator went on unperturbed, "that the people would stand for less food, less personal property, freedom? Isn't it a fact that you renegades will eventually want to seize transmutation factories to prove that the output can be increased to sustain even more persons whom you would have live past the age of eight hundred? But just conceive of this entire globe as one great collection of near critical-mass piles, ready to set up a wild chain reaction as soon as the safety limit of just one factory is exceeded!"

Berek stared down at his hands and half turned from Diboar. He wondered whether the post-mortals knew the solution; whether they were the proponents of some staggering plan to defeat mandatory death conditioning—a plan that also took into consideration the ut-

ter impossibility of allowing the population to increase as life-spans were lengthened.

"What do the post-mortals want?" Diboar shouted the question this time.

Berek said nothing.

Diboar finally shrugged and turned toward the exit. "Tonight," he said emotionally, "I shall appear before the Council to receive their order for summary execution. The edict will establish that any person who refuses to accept mandatory death or tries to evade it, will be executed in a most —uncomfortable manner . . . torture, I believe they once called it."

Surrounded by the Corpsmen, Berek submissively followed him through the scintillating wall. They led him outside through the twilight and into another building. Then they went down corridor after corridor.

Eventually, after they reached an area that was redolent with the heavy scent of antiseptic, Diboar and Lidorn gravitated before an admit area and strode through, the guards ushering Berek in after them.

AS the administrator and the Corps Commander stepped into the room, they gasped and lunged forward. Halfway through, Berek saw they were rushing to-

ward the far side of the compartment where the slim form of a dark-haired girl was spearing through the air.

It was Vella!

The guards within the room and the white-uniformed technicians all turned to lunge toward her at the same time, each apparently surmising her intention.

But her flight had been ill aimed. The trajectory took her up and over the small table and, as she sailed by, she kicked furiously in an attempt to stop herself in mid-air, reaching out ineffectually for the knife.

She screamed just before she hit the far wall and crashed limply to the floor.

Berek shouted and surged forward. But the guards seized his arms and held him in an overpowering grip.

Diboar and Lidorn knelt beside Vella.

"She's only stunned," observed the Corps Commander.

The Administrator lifted her onto the large table equipped with shackles. He turned to the two guards who had originally been assigned to the laboratory. "You will report back to your group commander immediately." He motioned to Lidorn. "See that they are dealt with for this laxity!"

Vella stirred and opened her

eyes, tried to rise. But Diboar held her down by the shoulders. "So you would use the knife to avoid being forced to tell where the other post-mortals are?" He laughed.

She squirmed under his grip.

Then his tone became derisive. "Perhaps we would let you use the knife were it not for the fact that we won't be robbed of one of the subjects for the first public post-mortal execution."

Vella winced and looked helplessly at Berek.

He writhed under conflicting emotions. There was a bitterness over her selfish unconcern for his capture—a capture which she, herself, must have helped plot. But still there was an undeniable refusal to believe there wasn't some ultimate justification, no matter how incredible, for her treachery.

Diboar picked up the knife and held its blade between his fingers.

"You will get the knife, my dear little renegade. Do not worry about that. But it will be in the manner that we choose to apply."

He nodded toward the technician who came and locked the manacles about her ankles and wrists.

Berek wrenched his right arm loose from the grips of two of the Corpsmen. Then he crashed his fist into the face of one of the pair on his left. The man collapsed and

he tore free completely.

But, as he turned to race for Diboar, the three Corpsmen closed in on him again and his swinging arms delivered only futile blows into the maze of hands that reached out to constrain him in another, more determined grip.

Diboar surveyed the activity with amusement.

Then he turned to the other technician. "You have the other scanner tuned to his psycho-potentialities?"

"It is all ready, Excellency."

"Then let us waste no more time in dispensing with this matter."

"Shall we proceed with caution in order to preserve their mentalities?"

"It makes no difference. With all the post-mortals trapped, there will be others for your hungry probes and eventually for Exhibition Plaza."

The guards carried Berek to the table in the second recess as Diboar headed for the exit area.

Aren't you going to remain and watch?" Lidorn asked.

"We'll watch later. I've ordered it all put on visuo-tape. It's time to go before the council and tell them we're ready for the execution order."

CHAPTER VIII

OSAD and Felir were alone among the ruins outside the sub-surface room. For a long while they had sat in silent dejection.

"We should leave, I tell you," Felir said finally. "It is not right to ask the others to remain here only to wait until they are captured."

"Leave? But where would we go? We cannot return to the surface again."

"We could at least get away from here." He waved his arm in front of him. "These ruins extend for miles in all directions. We could flee from this site and still remain under the surface."

"But they do not extend far enough to get us away from the area being guarded by the Corps. Anyway, it is only at this location that we have provided water and electricity."

"Thirst and darkness," Felir observed caustically, "would certainly be better than capture and death."

"We cannot leave," Osad sighed. "It is only here that we can operate the memory bank and restore Berek's memory."

Felir lurched up and jerked his head toward the metal ceiling. The entrance area had begun to glow faintly.

Osad was rigid where he sat. The glow increased in intensity

and abruptly a form dropped through.

"A Corpsman!" Osad whispered hoarsely as the man fell toward them.

But Felir had already bolted into action. He lunged for the descending man's legs.

The Corpsman kicked out as he fell, striking Felir on the shoulder and sending him flailing backward. Then his weapon was in his hand and he fired a lethal bolt whose flash lighted the panorama of ruins like a burst of daylight.

It went wild as Felir dived in under the tube of the gun. Then he caught the man's wrist and smashed his other fist against the Corpsman's chin.

The Corpsman's helmet flew from his head and he lost his grip on the weapon. As both men fell, Felir seized it and fired twice. The Corpsman collapsed.

"I don't think he had time to report back after he dropped through," Felir said, breathing hard.

"But he will have reported his position only recently," Osad said worriedly. "When he does not report again, they will be able to narrow their search to within a few hundred yards of here."

ONLY the faint whine of the electrical equipment and the

steady breathing of the technician at the scanner's control console broke the silence in the recess.

Berek strained at the manacles that held his limbs firmly against the table; he tried to twist his head in the vise-like grip of the metal band that encircled his forehead.

"Vella!" he cried.

There was no answer from the other recess. Then he remembered they had started with him much earlier than with her and she would only now be braced for the initial onslaught of the punishing current.

The twin wires leading through the pinpoint holes in his skull were like jets of white-hot flame and he squirmed under their hateful, relentless torture.

The scanner's circuits were warmed up now and the initial weak impulses of the probing vibrations were like lengths of barbed wire being drawn through his brain. He moaned in agony.

Full power was surging through the wires now and each rush of current was an additional knife that sliced through his brain. But he fought the searching force, seeking to hold back any information they might be trying to squeeze out of him. Abruptly, however, he searched for the logic in his resistance. Why should he deliver his sanity for the mysterious group

who had surrendered him to the tortures?

He started to relax and end his struggle against the sickening, pulsing charges. But a new sound stayed his surrender—an agonized half-groan, half-shout from the other recess.

"Vella!" he roared, straining furiously against the metal ringlets that held him.

THE initial impulses that raced through the wires into her head were benevolent ones. They deprived her of all physical sensations as she sank into a state of semi-consciousness. But soon came the intense pain as the charges hurled themselves viciously into the depths of her mind.

Diboar's threat had not been idle words. The knife had been used on her . . . the knife and a drill at opposite sides of her skull to clear a path for the wires that would carry the impulses into her brain. But that part of the operation had been merciful. An anesthetizing pencil-size beam had been flashed first on both areas.

Now, however, nothing was painless about the procedure. A river of lava flowed through her head and there were a myriad fiery explosions—incessant blasts that sent out tongues of scorching heat and pressure to sear every nerve fibre

in her cortex.

Her tortured mind imparted enough consciousness to her body to allow a faint spasm and a single scream that trailed off into a moan.

Now the searching impulses were a mad vortex that swirled into one side of her head and out the other, taking with it entire groups of duplicate memory impressions, seemingly correlating them as it went.

She was conscious of fleeting images of the predominant impressions as they were wrenched away—scenes of intimacies which she had known with Berek; of their normal, boundlessly happy life together before they were drawn into the post-mortal movement and gripped by the anxieties with which it harassed them.

She was both embarrassed and angered over the realization that these same impressions would be laid bare for Diboar and all the others to inspect; that they were even now being scrutinized by the technician at the control console.

She tried to scream again as the torture mounted to unbearable proportions and swept away all other considerations except the sensation of pain. But her near lifeless body did not respond.

LIKE a great sucking whirlpool, the scanner was drawing from Berek every bit of knowledge he

had ever acquired. And, as impulses representing the impressions were swept through the instrument's convertors, the pertinent ones were separated and shunted into a special circuit.

Dazed, he wondered why he was still maintaining his sanity—why he could think clearly despite the agonies of the ordeal. True he had relaxed somewhat, having decided to end his resistance after he had realized he had no information which could serve to harm either Vella or the renegades. But even total submission would not be assurance that he would retain his rationality.

As though the probing impulses had suddenly become suspicious that he had perhaps found some way to withhold the information they sought, the charges were now boring into his brain in unabated fury.

A final surge of maximum intensity crashed in and the excruciation began tapering off, as though his numb senses were finally refusing to acknowledge additional pain.

Now, after an eternity, the scanning was drawing toward its inevitable end—and he was still sane!

Abruptly there was a vague half-realization that perhaps others—the post-mortals had known all along the psycho-scanning would not destroy his mentality. He sus-

pected that in some manner he had been trained to withstand the effects of the probe.

As the charges mercifully diminished, he sank into an exhausted state of unconsciousness.

NONE of the screams reached her lips. In the unbearable agony they were being born and were dying within the confines of her pain-isolated mind, her limp body lacking the facilities to give them outer expression.

But despite the relentless assaults by the maddening, surging electronic hell, she was still frightfully aware that the scanner was now passing on to her vital stores of knowledge. Knowledge that would doom the post-mortals and would send the technicians rushing from the laboratory to tell Diboar he must not make a public spectacle of Berek's execution.

Desperately, she tried to force the forbidden knowledge into the farthest depths of her consciousness where they might escape the searching impulses.

Relentlessly, the charges bored down after them. In utter despondency, she realized she could fight no longer. Slowly, she started to dissolve her resistance.

But suddenly she was aware of a physical sensation that reached her through the overwhelming

flood of excruciations.

Phase Positive! Another seizure was coming on! She remembered abruptly that the process could be accelerated by emotional turmoil!

Even as Vella's final idea formed itself into a superficial impression and raced through the wires into the bowels of the console, the scanning instrument hissed and sputtered and crackled.

Glass tinkled as electronic tubes shattered and smoke began curling up out of the louvres of the metal cabinet.

The technician shouted hoarsely and leaped from the control seat. He turned impulsively to rip the wires from the subject's head.

But the subject was not there!

The table where she had lain was empty!

His next shout was one of terror as he raced into the other recesses where the second technician was backing away from his console, which was sputtering and smoking as violently as was its counterpart.

"Did yours go to pieces too?" the latter glanced at the instrument, then at the unconscious Berek who had been his subject.

The first technician, his eyes wide with terror, ignored the question."

The girl!" he shouted. "She's gone! She disappeared!"

Together they sprinted back into the first recess.

Vella lay unconscious on the table, breathing almost imperceptibly.

"I WANT the edict broadcast every half hour," Diboar said into the silvery disk on his desk.

"Yes, Excellency," a tinny voice acknowledged.

Lidorn, seated at the side of the desk, shifted uneasily. "I said the laboratory reported the girl disappeared and reappeared," he repeated.

The Administrator motioned for silence.

"Everyone in this zone," he continued, still speaking into the disk, "is to witness the double execution in person. The edict has the Council's official stamp on it, so it takes precedence over the local orders in every other zone. You will notify each Zonal Administrator that every citizen in his area is to observe the proceedings at either public or private screens."

"Yes, Excellency."

"I want the first message sent out within ten minutes. The edict bears the time of execution, which is less than twelve hours away."

The Administrator replaced the disk and rose. He glanced through the transparent wall at the moonlight-limned spires, then walked

over to a reflecting area built in the other wall.

"The technician says the girl disappeared and reappeared while she was being scanned," Lidorn stood beside him.

"Disappeared?"

"Yes, Your Sub-Excellency. The technician said the scanner suddenly developed several short circuits and burned itself out. When he rushed to withdraw the leads from the subject, she was gone. He said he then went to the other recess, where the probing of Berek had been completed. The scanner there was ruined too. When the two operators returned to the first machine, they found that the girl had reappeared."

"The scanning of Berek?" Diboar asked. "Did the operator manage to complete it?"

"Yes. But we learned only that he was correct—he had no memory covering the past twenty-five years."

"Very well, then. Have both scanners repaired. I want them ready within two days, at the most. We will have other subjects to use them on."

"They will be ready by tomorrow . . . But you don't understand, Excellency. I said the girl disappeared and reappeared!"

Diboar laughed. "Those fool technicians! They experience a

backfire hallucination and don't even recognize it."

Lidorn frowned in puzzlement.

"Of course," Diboar reassured. "This isn't the first time. It's happened before—with exceptionally strong subjects . . . During the period of probing, they create an hallucination subconsciously and hurl it back at the operator. It's purely an automatic defense mechanism."

"But it was an hallucination that ruined both scanners?"

Diboar laughed. "I suppose you will have me believe she disappeared and reappeared in the squad car too. It was a simple case of something being wrong with the power supply; of the defect facilitating the hallucination. I suspect the power supply because both scanners were affected.

"Have them placed on separate circuits so that in the future a defect in one will not rob us of the use of both."

Lidorn shrugged. "Do you want Berek and the girl scanned again?"

"By the time the scanners are repaired, they will have already played their final roles on Exhibition Plaza. Did we learn anything from the girl?"

"Nothing. Her scanning had only started when she disappeared—when the breakdown came."

"Berek?"

"There were a few impossible impressions—probably persecution complex delusions. He seems to believe the post-mortals engineered his capture by my men. There was also a scene between him and Vella in which she said it was all part of a plot to overthrow the government. But this, too, could have very easily been in the nature of a delusion."

Diboar laughed. "A plot to overthrow the government, indeed! A handful of persons who are even now cringing while they await their capture! Come, let us retire. We shall need rest for the executions, tomorrow morning."

CHAPTER IX

BEREK sat listlessly on the single chair in his cell, gazing out the small, transparent area at the moonlight illuminated metal of the buildings. His fingers explored his head as he wondered vaguely why there were neither sore regions nor punctures to indicate where the probing wires had pierced his scalp and skull.

Abruptly there was a slight motion to his left. His head snapped in that direction.

The emaciated man was there—the one he had seen at the mouth of the cavern!

Berek lurched up.

"Do not be afraid. I am Osad. I have come to help you."

Suspiciously, Berek backed away. "Help me? With another syringe perhaps? How did you get in—?"

"I am sorry for that bit of trickery. But it was necessary. You had to be captured so that you would be submitted to the psycho-scanners *before* we restored your memory . . . You have been before the scanners, I hope."

Absently, Berek nodded.

"Fine! And the execution?"

Berek recoiled at the exuberant expectancy reflected in the question.

"Tomorrow morning."

"Come then, let us go."

Vella *had* said the post-mortals were his friends; that his memory *would* be restored—in time. Cautiously, he stepped toward the ancient one. Closer, it was as though he could discern a kindly glimmer in the small but vividly sincere eyes.

"We must waste no time," Osad prompted. "Give me your hand."

Hesitatingly, Berek extended it.

"Now, close your eyes," Osad instructed, taking the hand and holding it firmly.

Unable to account for his willingness to co-operate, Berek complied.

A moment later, he sighed impa-

tiently, began a protest. "What is all this intended to—"

He opened his eyes and started. *He was no longer in his cell!*

Instead, he stood with Osad in a small, musty chamber whose crumbling walls were of a gray, granular substance. An archway on his left led into a much larger room where scores of others moved about silently at the far end.

"Post-mortals!" he exclaimed. Then he turned fearfully toward Osad. "But only a second ago we were in the cell! How can we—?"

Osad smiled. "There is no time for explanations. Will you be satisfied with your memory, which contains *all* the explanations?"

He pointed toward a table in the center of the small room. On its surface was a cluster of coils and tubes and flickering lights. The steady hum of a number of transformers and a score of clacking relays came from units hidden within the mass. There was a helmet-like affair, too, connected to the rest of the equipment by twin wires.

"Recognize it?" Osad asked, as he motioned him into a chair by the table. "You should. You are the one who perfected the memory bank."

For a moment, at least one of the incongruous factors seemed plausible. It *was* possible that he

had invented a memory bank. He remembered now that when he had worked in Bioelectronics before retiring he had dedicated a full hundred years to research along those lines—had been near success at the end, too.

He sat in the chair and Osad placed the helmet on his head. Then he closed his eyes and waited.

What would the memories bring back? Even if there should suddenly be an entire series of events to bridge the gap, how could he be sure the events were ones that had occurred to him? How could he know all of this was not part of an even more fantastic trick?

A switch clicked and swirling lights blazed in his brain as the helmet became warm. The effects were almost paralyzing, but not painfully so.

The scintillating lights were impressions of sight, sound, taste—all whirling in a phantasmagoria of motion to find their proper places along the convolutions of his cortex. It was a maddening vortex that bored fiercely into his consciousness.

He tried to grasp some of the impressions . . .

There were faces—some of them he half-recognized; scenes—weird, underground views in not one, but several hiding places in natural reservations and deserted build-

ings; words—amazingly meaningful words, but words that, at the same time, meant nothing because they refused to remain stationary long enough to be studied.

There was a central figure too—one who appeared repeatedly. A man. A weirdly different man. One he knew was many hundreds of years past the mandatory death age because his face sagged and he trembled as he walked . . . Osad!

The memory parcels did not seem to be permanent. They lacked the materiality which Berek suspected was necessary to make them an integrated part of his recall mechanism. They faded into nothingness almost as fast as he focused his attention on them.

And as quickly as he trapped one and attempted to scrutinize it for greater detail, he found that it no longer existed. Almost frantically, he chased from one memory trace to the next, trying to wring from them at least part of the explanation that he sought.

But the inner lights flickered with a more intense hypnotic glimmer that produced an exhausting effect. For a while he tried to fight the lethargy that gripped him, tried to keep his attention riveted on the fleeting impressions. But soon he gave up the struggle and his head fell forward on the table.

Then he was conscious of noth-

ing—not even the brilliant, dancing lights.

“**A**WAKE, Berek.”

A hand shook him roughly. He opened his eyes. Osad stood before him. There were three other men in the room.

He ignored them all as they watched him closely—ignored them to turn his thoughts inward on the impressions of the past twenty-five years.

But there were none!

He still had no memory!

“Liar!” he shouted vehemently. “There is no memory!”

Enraged, he lunged at Diboar.

The three men closed in on him and wrapped arms about his body, holding him back, pinning his hands helplessly to his side.

“It’s no trick, Berek,” Osad assured him. “Your memories are all there! Only, you will not be conscious of them until the proper moment. Each impression was received with a blocking impulse that sent it directly into the level below your subconscious—all of them to be released at the most propitious moment. It had to be that way, Storing them *below* your subconscious will make them just a little harder to get at if the Administrator should decide to submit you to the scanner again • before the execution.”

Berek struggled desperately to break their grips. “There will be no more scanning. Both machines were short-circuited while they were working on Vella and—”

“Vella!” Osad grew pale.

Berek felt the others stiffen in apprehension as they held him.

“Vella is a captive?” Osad demanded.

“God, Osad!” exclaimed one of the men. “What will we do? How much did they learn from her?”

Osad paced. “Apparently not enough. The execution is to be tomorrow. If they had learned all—or even enough—there would be no execution.”

He turned back to Berek. “Are they going to execute both of you?”

Confused over the episode which was making no sense to him, Berek nodded.

One of the men holding him shouted in sudden alarm. “They may decide to take *her* first!”

Berek stiffened with a sudden realization. “You can save her! Just like you took me from the cell, you can save her also!”

His eyes burned their plea into Osad’s.

“Can we?” one of the men asked.

“I don’t know,” Osad muttered. “I don’t know. If she should experience another Phase Positive seizure while I tried to move her

it might mean her immediate death. We'd have to balance that possibility against the consideration that they might dispose of Berek first tomorrow . . . Let me get him back to the cell, then I'll be able to think more clearly."

Berek squirmed furiously against the hands that held him. "I'm not going back!"

Osad walked forward and grasped his hand. "Release him," he instructed the others.

They loosed Berek and lurched backward.

Berek immediately snatched his hand away from the old one's grasp.

But it was too late.

Already they were back in the cell!

He turned to seize Osad in a firm grip so he would not be able to leave.

But his hands closed on air and he was once more alone in the cell . . .

CHAPTER X

VELLA counted the hours left before the execution—all on the fingers of one hand.

Trembling, she lay quietly on the single cot in her cell and tried to shut her mind against the inevitable horrors that would come with the morning.

Diboar's messenger had said tortures would be employed as a shocking warning to the people of what would happen to the members of any other post-mortal movement which might be in the planning stage.

That she would die was now a matter of grim resignation.

But what about the post-mortals? Had Diboar only been bluffing; actually, when he boasted in the laboratory of having trapped them? The twenty-five years of planning and work, would it all have been in vain?

She buried her face in her hands and sobbed uncontrollably.

Suddenly Vella stiffened. The almost imperceptible vibrations were welling from deep within her body again—a subdued vacillation of her entire being!

Phase Positive!

It was upon her again! How many more times, she wondered, before . . .

She felt her physical form becoming immaterial, fluctuating into and out of—existence? It shimmered one last time, then . . . If she existed at all she knew it was not in the confines of her cell.

* * *

The office of the detention quarters was empty as Alarn materialized next to the desk. It was just as well, he thought, for now there

would be no violence or death that might lead them to suspect an incongruity.

Checking the roster on the wall, he located Vella's name.

Then he dematerialized again. When he was whole once more, he was in her cell.

But it was empty.

He faded and reappeared . . . this time in the subsurface room of masonry at Osad's side.

"She wasn't in her cell!" he exclaimed.

"Are you sure you got the right one?"

"I checked the prisoner list. It was the right one."

"Perhaps they moved her elsewhere," Osad suggested thoughtfully.

"But why would they?"

Osad's face showed excitement. "Phase Positive! She may have been in a seizure of Phase Positive!"

"You mean she may still be there but I just didn't see her?"

"Of course! Of Course! She could be going through the stage now."

"Not the final one?"

"No. Not the final. She would not be that far advanced. Nor would we be that fortunate."

"Then perhaps I'd better return and bring her back."

"It would be useless—and dan-

gerous now. The temporary stage may last ten minutes—or two hours. There's no way of knowing. If you tried to remove her while she's in that condition the results could be fatal."

A man raced into the room. "They're coming!" he cried. "I saw lights among the ruins far to the south! They're coming *under* the surface!"

Osad whirled and shouted to the scores at the other end of the room. "Quick! Out the back! Scatter among the ruins! Don't use your capsules! It is too late for that!"

He turned to Alarn. "Get as many away as possible!"

Then he ran on his aged legs to the nearest woman and caught her hand. A second later, he and the woman were standing on a utility landing level several hundred miles away.

Immediately, he was back in the underground room. He reached out to another woman; deposited her on the flat roof of a building a thousand miles in the other direction.

When he returned again, the room was empty. He raced to the rear exit. Scores were fanning out into the darkness among the rugged ruins. He dematerialized and rematerialized next to one of them, grasping her arm and disappearing with her, even as he saw Alarn

racing for another on his left.

VELLA was conscious of being on the cot within her cell once more. But the ominous vacillations within her body continued.

This was not going to be a single stage of a few seconds' duration. She realized that even as the quiet vibrations became spasms that wracked her entire body. She realized too that not only would emotional stress accelerate the phases, but such anxiety would also make them more severe.

She was conscious of her body wavering and disappearing as it had before. When she returned to full visibility, the transparent square in the outer wall of her cell was faintly illuminated with the light of dawn. She had been gripped in the stage for almost an hour that time!

Could she use Phase Positive? Could she employ it to teleport her location—perhaps to escape from her cell?

The vibrations were still there. As she felt them welling toward another temporary climax, she concentrated fervently.

When she was entirely whole again, she was in the corridor outside her compartment!

The undulations within were weak now. She cringed against the corridor wall, looking fearfully

in each direction and wondering whether there would be just one more stage in the current seizure.

It came.

She dematerialized.

When she rematerialized, she was outside the detention quarters!

But there would be no more dematerializations. The quiet mysterious unrest within her body that heralded the stage was gone.

She was on a landing level, the red metal walls of the prison behind her. Cautiously and afraid, she activated her deggravitator and started to push off over the ledge.

Shouts behind her!

Corpsmen raced around the sides of the building and over its top.

Guns blazed in their hands and lethal bolts leaped out hungrily at her.

She screamed and lunged for the ledge.

One of the beams flashed against her side and down her thigh. Her clothing was ripped away by its force and she sank into unconsciousness as the smell of her own seared, burning flesh became a pungency in the smoke-filled air.

CHAPTER XI

A LIGHT breeze played around the tallest spires of the Central Administration Cluster as Ber-ek, surrounded by guards, swam

upward from the Detention Quarters toward Exhibition Plaza, rising higher and higher above the domes and spires and flattop roofs that glistened like the facets of a thousand gems.

Three miles up, an almost solid layer of official cars, stationary at a designated anchor level, stretched out for miles, making the Plaza itself a dismal, shadowy plain that lurked ominously in the half-light.

Underneath the tier of cars, spectators arrived in cloud-like masses, swimming into position along an imaginary dome surrounding the building.

Berek and his guards finally reached the edge of the Plaza area and degravitated, dropping to the level. As they approached Execution Circle, marked off by a huge, white ring, bulky instruments reared out of the metal floor, lenses in their forefronts focused radially inward. Even now, Berek knew, every screen in the System was receiving the picture.

In the central circle, a section of the floor scintillated and scores of white robed Councilmen rose through, spread out into a fan shaped formation that provided each with an unrestricted view.

The Plaza was alive with the echo of a million whispered voices and Berek shut his eyes. Why, he shouted to himself, did he have to

die—like this . . . the victim of a torture contrived by the authorities; concurred in by Vella, and approved by his renegade colleagues and everyone else in the System.

Vella—he remembered her suddenly—was it barely possible that they would spare her the death he faced?

They stepped between two camera housings and into the Execution Circle and halted.

A SHOCK raced through his brain! He jolted and clamped his hands over his face. Suddenly a whole flood of information was in his mind—recollections which he had sought so desperately but which had been denied him!

His standing in the circle *had been a key!* A key to the knowledge hidden in the depths of his mind by Osad!

Trembling, he scrutinized the bits of returned memory.

Again there was the mental image of the old man . . . Osad. And he knew that Osad had lived a full life of almost five thousand years!

He had, as a result of accidentally inefficient conditioning, feared mandatory death and had fled the disposal chamber . . . *more than four thousand years ago!* He had, at the same time, found a means of leaving the System! Had trav-

eled from world to world throughout the Galaxy!

But, after thousands of years, he had come back, attracted by the vague possibility that now, when his ultimate life span was almost spent and he was near final death, he might as a last gesture find some way to crush the social order and open a new vista of civilization—one for which man had long ago ceased yearning . . . flight through the interstellar reaches!

Berek visualized the return of Osad; watched, through his rediscovered memory, Osad's abduction of a retired bioelectronics expert—one who was near the mandatory death age.

The selection was—Berek! Then he recalled Osad's snatching him away to one of the natural reservations only weeks before the death date. He remembered there had followed long months of deconditioning.

Then there was the final awakening and the subsequent horrifying realization of how terrible death actually was. He recalled convincing Osad that Vella too should be rescued.

And there was the realization that Osad had outlined a program; had spent weeks explaining how each individual possessed the unrealized heritage of interstellar, even intergalactic travel!

But Berek could not recall the plan. It was as though his memory would no longer function beyond that point. Would there be other key words or events, he wondered, that would cause him to recall the rest—before his death?

Mounting tension was reflected in restless murmurs from a million throats and the harsh sound snapped his attention back to the circle of death.

He turned his eyes to the dome of humanity. But he could see it but vaguely. Lights had been dimmed and were now concentrated only on Execution Circle.

From the ranks of the Councilmen, a lone figure rose and swam forward. It was Diboar.

"Citizen Berek," his voice boomed out into the audio pick-ups, "you will face the Council for the reading."

He unrolled a scroll and held it stiffly before him. "By Council Edict, Citizen Berek Ax40F10 is held guilty of violating an unwritten but basic law of civilization. Through his abject disregard for the principle of mandatory death . . ."

FOR Vella it had been a nightmare of pain as she lay suspended in the half-plane between life and death. There were brief recollections of opening her eyes

and vaguely viewing the white-uniformed attendants around her.

And there were even dimmer remembrances of needles piercing her arm and medicinal solutions being applied to the burned wound in her side and along her leg.

Finally, someone had said, "We have no more time. That will have to be good enough."

"Anyway," another had agreed, "Lidorn said he would be satisfied if we patched her up sufficiently to get her to the Plaza and have her last a few minutes beyond that."

Movement came next. A brutal, jarring motion that began in the dimly lighted corridors of the Medical Building. The merciless jogging continued for an eternity until suddenly fierce, brilliant light burst like an explosion upon her closed eyelids.

Feebly, she tried to turn over in the stretcher. But pain delivered her back into unconsciousness.

When she was next in partial command of her senses and forced her eyelids open, she saw they were settling down to the surface of Exhibition Plaza.

Ahead were the glaring lights that bathed Execution Circle, illuminating a figure dressed in council robes, and several guards holding a tall figure—Berek!

BEREK was inattentive to the legal phrases which outlined his crime.

Instead, he dazedly surveyed new recollections suddenly opened to his conscious on hearing the initial words of the document—words that must have been the second "key."

He started to turn his thoughts full upon the remembrances.

But it was a visual stimulus, instead, that captured his attention. Four men, bearing a stretcher, suddenly stepped into the area of bright lights and deposited the litter on the metal surface.

He gazed down at Vella's still face and the wound that was visible through the seared and torn garment.

He struggled furiously against the grip of his captors as Diboar continued to read the edict.

But even despite the sensations of helplessness and distress that wracked Berek, the new recollections surged through his mind.

He visualized *himself*—on a cot in a subterranean region. He lay still, as though in a coma. His form grew faint—and disappeared! Later—whether it was minutes or hours later he did not know—he rematerialized.

And he knew a strange process was taking place while he lay not once, but several times in the

death-like trance. But the process was vague and he could not recall either its cause or its results.

Then Osad's words, spoken long ago, resounded once more. The ancient one spoke of a long-extinct form of earth life—insect life. The common name of the species was—*caterpillar*. He visualized the larva spinning its cocoon, lying in physical lethargy while tremendous body changes took place and it assumed a new form—the *butterfly*. It was an amazing process, this *metamorphosis*.

But Berek was even more dumb-founded as the awakening part of his mind went on to reproduce the theory that *humans were capable of the same process*.

The human form, too, when it reached approximately eight hundred and twenty-five years, was capable of metamorphosis! But there was one distinction: Where only the butterfly could produce the eggs from which came the larvae, both the pre-chrysalis and the metamorphosed human form were capable of reproduction.

He saw too that humans, who were invariably victims of mandatory death at eight hundred years, had never lived long enough to arrive at the chrysalis stage—the brief psychic periods of intermittent non-existence which occurred while the individual acquired the

new characteristics.

The realizations from forgotten memory startled him and held him rigid while Diboar completed the proclamation.

Berek remembered that Osad was *different* in a manner far more spectacular than suggested by his mere wrinkled skin. But he could not define the greater difference. Even knowing now that Osad represented the metamorphosed human, Berek still was not aware of the physiological differences entailed—the new potentialities.

He knew only that a change in the human form had occurred. But what were the new characteristics?

CHAPTER XII

INTENSE darkness was everywhere—except for a pinpoint of light far off to the left and another bobbing one that appeared and disappeared among the boulders to their right.

But the three renegades — the two men and the woman groped their way onward into the light-devoid area.

"How do we know?" she asked imploringly, in a whisper. "How do we know that they don't have physio-detectors?"

There was no reassurance in the continued silence from the two

men.

"This way," one of them said. "Here the surface seems to go down. Perhaps we'll find some sort of fissure where we can hide."

She felt the pull of his hand and followed, drawing with her the man who held her other hand.

Abruptly they were blinded by a brilliant light that flashed in their faces from the top of a huge stone formation immediately ahead.

Another beam focused on them from their right.

The girl screamed.

A deadly bolt leaped out from a point next to the light atop the boulder.

The man on her left fell—his head half burned off.

"Wait!" shouted the light bearer on their other side. "We're not to kill *all* of them."

Horried, she and her male companion backed away. She stumbled over rubble and caught his arm for support. They both fell among the dust encrusted stones.

And purple rays leaped out to engulf them with their paralyzing effects.

A mile east of the underground room, two women, clinging to each other's hands, raced aimlessly among the broken bricks and slabs under the metal ceiling.

They fell, picked themselves up

and raced on again and again—all without ever releasing their handgrips. One of them sobbed as she fled.

The other's breath was too erratic to accommodate sobs, so she ran in silence.

Their legs and knees were lacerated and bleeding and the scratches and bruises on their palms and elsewhere on their bodies were like little areas of fire—burning fiercely with the grit and dust that clung to the raw flesh.

One of them reached out, touched a boulder and felt her way around it, drawing the other with her.

A light flashed upon them. Another.

Their screams rose as one.

Lethal rays cut them down, leaving only charred flesh and the crisp remnants of burned clothes where they had stood cringing from the light.

ALARN materialized a hundred feet behind the armed Corpsman. As he stepped forward, his foot displaced a loose stone.

The Corpsman whirled around, flashing the light in front of him.

Alarn dematerialized.

The Corpsman searched the area with his light and eyes. Satisfied no one was there, he pushed on into the blackness—toward the

other small, bobbing lights that were converging on the central area of the section of subsurface ruins.

Alarn rematerialized and seized a large stone. He strode forward. This time more stealthily. He covered the last few feet in a burst of speed and brought the massive rock down on the Corpsman's head.

Even before the man fell lifelessly on the ground, Alarn had dematerialized, concentrating on the next intended point of materialization — the adjacent, irregularly moving light that betrayed the location of another Corpsman.

* * *

Another felt his way cautiously through the rubble.

"It is Osad," he called. "Is there anyone near?"

"Here, Osad," a soft, apprehensive voice answered. "It is Felir."

Excitedly, Osad stumbled forward, finally reached an extended hand.

Abruptly, they were both standing in bright sunlight atop a utility landing level hundreds of miles away. Felir squinted against the intense glare.

"Have you saved many?" he asked.

"Only a handful. It is too difficult to find them in the darkness."

"The execution?"

"It must be under way now."

"Vella—did you get her away safely?"

"There was no time. And it is too late now. If I removed her from Exhibition Plaza they would know the supernormal nature of the post-mortals and would stop the execution in time."

"Will we make it, Osad?" Felir asked anxiously. "Will we come out all right?"

"I don't know." He shook his head. "They have killed many. They have captured many . . . If only our percentage of post-humans were greater, we would have been able to save them all. But the rest—all those who are awaiting the change — are dead weight. Only Alarn and I were available to save scores. And we had to be careful so our tactics would not be observed."

"Those who were captured—where are they?"

"Already they have been taken to the psycho-scanners. Of course, they are relatively safe—physically. If the plan succeeds, they will not only be freed, but also honored."

"It'll be close, then?"

"It'll be very close. If they learn the nature of the post-mortals in time, they'll be sure to halt the execution. The plan's only

hope is in completely demoralizing the authorities long enough to . . ."

He stopped suddenly. "If only I could get them to speed up the execution!" he exclaimed.

Then he dematerialized abruptly.

BEREK realized the reading of the document was complete.

But he did not look at Diboar, who stood proudly, silently in front of him.

Instead, his eyes were fastened on Vella who still lay on the stretcher. But she was no longer unconscious. Her face was turned toward him and she smiled weakly.

He wrenched violently to free himself. But the guards only secured their grips and twisted his arms painfully behind him.

Another Corpsman came forward, wielding a long, narrow rod, its outthrust end terminating in jagged, sharp edges.

There was eager intent in the man's eyes and a lurid smile distorted his mouth.

Berek stiffened. In the proclamation Diboar had mentioned a torture that would begin with "deprivation by brutal means" of the receptive and communicative senses.

Desperately, Berek lunged to break free. But his struggles were futile.

Then the Corpsman was upon him. He reached out with a clawing hand and gripped Berek's hair to hold his head steady.

The jagged end of the rod struck out in a twisting, grinding thrust. Berek screamed.

The rod was withdrawn.

With his still whole eye, he watched the weapon jab forward again.

Then he could see nothing.

There was a mixture of sounds from the Councilmen and the distant spectators as the guards released him and he slumped to the cold metal of the surface. He lay there, his tortured face buried in bent arms.

Through the pall of agony crept the ominous murmurings, like a thousand winds, from the canopy of spectators—murmurings of fear.

Writhing, he drew his hands to his downturned face to wipe away the blood.

But there was no blood! His groping fingers touched only dry skin! Dumbfounded, he lifted his head a few inches off the floor—not far enough to expose his face to the guards.

He could see! They had gouged out his eyes with a metal rod and yet he could see!

SUDDENLY a voice:
"Don't look up; Berek!"

It was Osad!

Berek lay still.

"You couldn't see me anyway," the other continued.

The voice was near Berek's right shoulder. He looked out from under his arm. But no one was there!

"They've found our hiding place!" Osad whispered. "They've already taken the captives to the memory scanners. You've got to make them get this over with quickly! Don't resist!"

"But—"

Osad's gasp of horror exploded in his ear. "Vella! They haven't started on *her* yet, have they?"

Before he could answer, Osad went on, in alarm. "Berek! She hasn't completed the metamorphosis! She's *still* a normal woman! You've got to make sure they finish with you *before* they start on her if you want her to live!"

"But what—?" he began again, confounded.

"I have no time. I've got to get to the psycho-lab to see if I can't interfere with the scanning before it's too late."

"But you've got to take her away! She's been wounded and —" He stopped suddenly, realizing Osad was no longer there.

Cautiously, Berek raised his head. The guards were on either side of him, Diboar in front. The

latter was surveying an assortment of instruments—that rose through the metal surface.

Berek recognized some of the bulky instruments. There was a receptor unit from the organic-materials transmutational laboratory . . . He winced as he imagined an arm or leg being thrust into its maw and withdrawn as an unrecognizable mass of base, food-building substance—red, bulbous, pulsating . . .

Then there was a flame-throwing neutron torch for alloy shaping. Beside it was an electron cutting blade, its exposed beam, white-hot, pointed into the air on its swivel spout.

He regained his feet, swaying. But he was too far from the cameras for his facial detail to be recorded by the video pickups.

As additional instruments of torture came from the floor, the frightened whispers of the multitude rose again in the air about him.

The guard who had wielded the jagged rod turned from his position next to Diboar and glanced at Berek. Their eyes locked momentarily.

Then the Corpsman screamed until his hoarse voice silenced itself with a guttural whimper. Trembling, he pointed and backed away.

"He sees!" he shouted. "His eyes—*they're unharmed!*"

Madness flashed on his face and his chin hung in disbelief.

Diboar whirled and jolted, his stare riveting on Berek.

FIRST only disbelief was reflected in the Administrator's eyes. Then rage transformed his features as he snatched the gouging rod from the Corpsman.

He bore down on Berek, raising the weapon high over his head.

The dome of spectators shifted, and their cries of bewilderment became a roar as Berek instinctively tried to dodge.

But the rod crashed down on his head with a sickening impact.

He shouted in intense pain, still reacting impulsively.

But again there had been no pain! He raised an unsteady hand to feel the irregular indentation in his flesh and skull that had been carved by the force of the blow.

Even as his fingers touched the area, however, *the wound healed itself!*

Diboar, in unrestrained fury, struck again.

The second fracture healed, followed immediately by the third.

Under the physical force of the attack, Berek reeled back and lost

his footing, falling to the metal surface.

The air was a tempest of frenzied shouts and sunlight was beginning to shine through breaches in the canopy as spectators broke away in frightened awe.

Berek lay motionless as Diboar, dazed, dropped the weapon and darted to the electron knife, degravitating its heavy base and wresting it over to the prisoner.

He grasped the flame-spewing spout and swung it across Berek's midsection.

The beam sliced through. Of that Berek was sure. But even before it could be swept around again, his body was whole once more!

Diboar dropped the fire-spitting nozzle. "He can't be killed!" he shouted.

That was it! Realization that he couldn't die was the final key! It was true! He could *not* die . . . not until he had lived out his normal life-span in this new psychophysiological form. The metamorphosis had turned him into something more than a physical being!

He did not quite understand what it was. Nor had Osad. They had been satisfied with the assumption it was something beyond comprehension, just as the functioning of the eye, to primitive man, was beyond understanding until a

science was evolved that could explain the optical and physiological phenomena.

But they did know some of the effects of the changed form . . . The superbod—the physical one, together with personalized articles such as clothing or subcutaneous deggravitator pack—either *existed* or *did not exist* in compliance with the will!

Included in the general traits was a characteristic of almost immediate regeneration of any member that was damaged or destroyed!

Twice, he realized now, he had experienced that manifestation—when he had imagined his body had passed through the freight capsule in the pneuma-tube and when the incisions in his scalp had seemed to heal themselves after the psycho-scanner leads had been withdrawn.

He remembered now there was another stupendous characteristic of the new form . . . *instantaneous teleportation!*

The intellect, uninhibited by any of the physical laws, could send itself instantly to any desired new location. With the departure of the intellect, the physical form ceased to exist—while the intellect proceeded, together with the potential for reformation of the body, to the new site of existence.

That, he remembered suddenly,

was how Osad had reached other worlds in the Galaxy and outside of the Galaxy!

DIBOAR recovered from his astonishment and again seized the metal rod.

He raced toward Vella who now, despite the agony that wracked her body, had risen to her knees to watch the scene of triumph for the post-mortals.

Vella was normal! The realization was a horror in Berek's mind. He and Alarn, besides Osad, were the "only two post-humans. She had not completed the natural metamorphosis and could still die!

He lunged across the Plaza to intercept the Administrator. But the Corpsmen who had guarded Vella bolted out to throw their arms around him and prevent his interference.

Diboar reached Vella, grasped her wrist and pulled her out toward the center of the circle.

Berek strained and lurched against the grips of his captors.

Then suddenly he remembered his new powers. As though his arms were passing through a polarized admit area, they slipped *through* the hands of the guards.

He threw himself on Diboar in time to intercept the heavy rod in its downward plunge.

The weapon wrenched from Dib-

oar's hand, and he backed away from Berek . . . toward the area where the unmanned, spitting flame of the electron knife spewed aimlessly into the air.

His heel contacted the coiled tube and he fell screaming into the fiery beam. Before his body collapsed on the metal surface, the knife had sliced through him four times.

The Corpsmen who had held Berek turned and fled.

Vella, unconscious and hardly breathing, lay at Berek's feet. He knelt beside her.

Her form seemed to waver for a moment, then it grew steady again. He recognized the symptoms of Phase Positive.

She dematerialized. A moment later she reappeared. And the wound in her side did not seem to be nearly as severe as it had before.

Again, she disappeared and rematerialized. This time the wound was almost completely healed! That could only signify this would be her last seizure of Phase Positive. She would emerge with all the true post-human potentialities.

Vella dematerialized again—this time probably for several minutes. There was nothing he could do but wait.

The circle of spectators, now curious after their initial fright, was forming again and the sky was

darkening. Some of the Councilmen were timidly returning to the surface of the Plaza. Once more, artificial lights bathed the area.

Suddenly, as though one final bit of memory had filtered through to his conscious, he saw why he had been kept intentionally unaware of the plan . . .

He *had* to face the death that the Council had warned it would decree for the post-mortals. Only such a spectacle could succeed in demoralizing the authorities long enough for him to describe the import of man's new destiny to the population of a score of allied worlds.

If the post-humans continued in their practice of indoctrinating single citizens, detection and sure death would be the constant threat hanging over all renegades past the mandatory death age who were trying to survive for the additional twenty-five years that must pass before the metamorphosis would occur.

Instead, the government had to be tricked into making a grand exhibition of the new type human—rather than be given time to learn about the metamorphosis and defeat it secretly in order to retain their selfish, uncontested control over the whole of humanity.

As it was, the search for the renegades had, for the past several

years, been the most vigorous undertaking of the government. It had been as determined as the hunt for Osad four thousand years ago—after he had tried to apprise the authorities then of the metamorphosis. He had failed, Berek knew, because those in power had been convinced that a human government would eventually become subservient to a post-human authority.

Berek saw also that his memory *had* to be erased before his capture so he could not betray the movement prematurely during the inevitable session with the memory scanners.

But still, it was necessary that he regain his memory in time to take advantage of the fear and confusion among the Councilmen and deliver his message over the Systemwide communications network.

Vella materialized for a moment, still unconscious, and disappeared again. It would be a few minutes before she would stand beside him, her arm around his waist, while he addressed billions of people.

The Councilmen were facing him in awe now. The sky was black again with spectators. Their frightened voices were heavy in the air.

He raised his arms.

Eventually, silence came.

"For thousands of years," he began, "every individual has been executed, voluntarily of course, at the age of eight hundred years, when, instead, he could have evolved into a new life form—some of the properties of which you have just witnessed. A life form capable of reaching any infinite distance . . ."

THE new world was green and fresh and damp. And the grass felt like silk under their feet.

It was good, Berek thought, to walk in a natural setting again and to gaze at distant horizons undescrated by ugly, angular shapes of metal—to see remote hills and clouds and birds and a thousand other wonders of nature.

He put his arm around Vella and she smiled up at him.

"Imagine," she said, "a whole planet full of natural reservations."

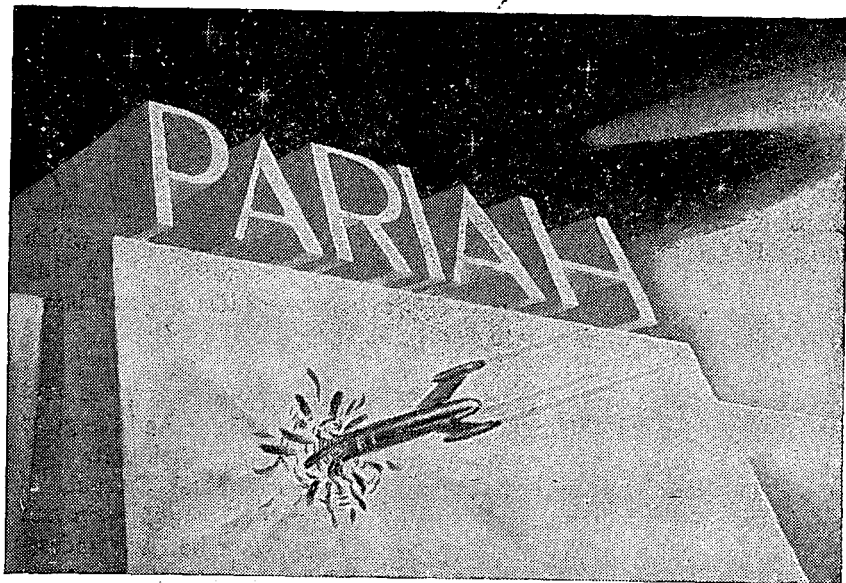
He grinned.

For a second a half-frown formed on her brow.

"Do you suppose," she asked, "Osad will have any difficulty setting up his new Transient Mortals Bureau?"

"Not if you look up," he said, "and smile as though you're enjoying it out here . . . Every screen in the System is focused on us for the proof."

THE END



by Milton Lesser

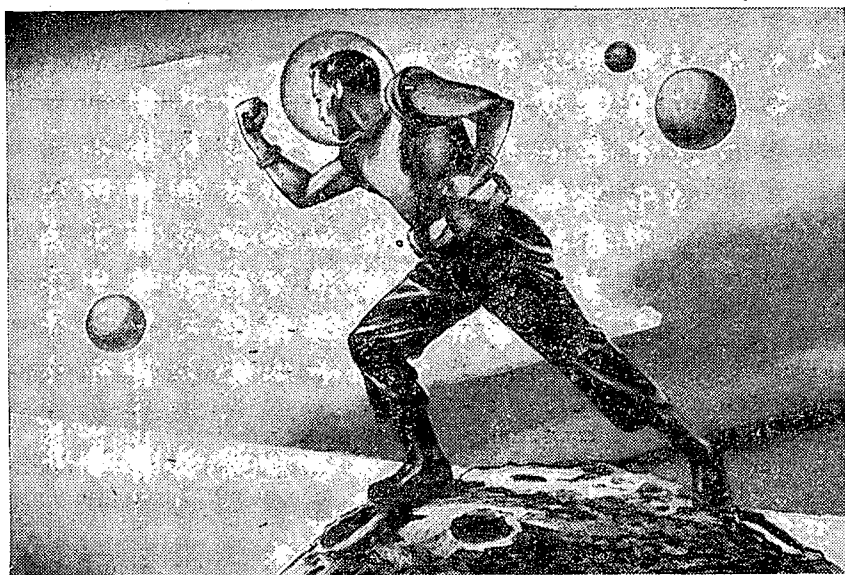
Harry spent three years in space waiting to get home to Earth — and his family. They were waiting for him too — that is, for his corpse . . .

CAPTAIN Greene shook his shaggy head and studied Al-lerton with patient eyes. "You're making a mistake," he said. "You'll be back."

The inside of the spaceship was quiet now, not with the silence of the tomb, but with the silence of barely inaudible echoes as if Al-lerton might still be able to hear the crew clomping about the com-

panionways on metal-shod feet if only he knew how to listen. He buried the notion under the sweet anticipation of homecoming and said, "I don't think so, captain. This is what I want, right here." He tapped the comforting bulk of his wallet, bulging the metallic cloth of his tunic.

He was a gaunt, comical figure of a man, so long and lean that he



stooped slightly at the waist and again at the shoulders, with a long, down-tipped nose which almost seemed to meet the thin-lipped mouth as he spoke. "What about you, captain?" he said. He was still savoring the joy of his own return, letting it build up inside him like a slow fire fanned by barely enough air to keep it kindled. He hardly cared whether Captain Greene disembarked or not, but the captain's unexpected lack of enthusiasm was a splendid counterpoint for his own emotions and he wanted to wring every last drop of joy from his homecoming. "All the men are gone," he went on. "This

is Earth, Captain."

"I don't leave the ship much these days, Allerton. I've got to complete the log, you know, then do a little advance astronauting for the trip out. Anyway, none of the others are spacemen, Allerton. An old spacedog like me can smell 'em a mile away—the real ones. You've got the makings, all right."

"You won't see me aboard the *Eros* again, though. I grew up in the depression of the eighties, captain. What I'm looking for is security. I've got it right here—enough to start a business of my own and give my kid the kind of education he needs these days.

Three years is a long time, but I tried to be a good spaceman."

"You were the best."

"Those kids running around after adventure, they'll be back. They're made for this life. They're too young and having too much fun to start thinking much about security. But now, you take me . . ."

"You'll have to make the decision yourself," Captain Greene admitted, leaning back comfortably with a cigar and reaching for his leather-bound log, his stubby fingers almost caressing the leaves with a love nurtured on long familiarity. "We blast off in a week," he said. "Enough time for you to decide, I guess."

"But I've already decided, sir." Allerton turned to go, stooping forward even more than usual to fit through the low doorway which, like anything else in the tight confines of a spaceship, was not made to accommodate his gangling figure.

"Well, don't forget this. You're wrong about the others. They're not for space, not the way you are. It's a common misconception. Good luck, Allerton."

But Allerton was already on his way down the companionway with its ghost-noises which he no longer could hear. He wondered what it

really took to make a man happy, truly happy over a sustained period. The flitting stolen moments of a spaceman's life, he knew, could never be for him. Yet outside the rain drummed down drearily on the gray apron of the landing pit and washed over Allerton with an ineffable sadness.

THE reporters were waiting for him down below, huddled together under a bobbing sea of umbrellas. He failed to understand why anyone should be waiting in the rain like that.

"I'm from the *Star-Herald*," one of the umbrella-shrouded faces told him, the voice steady and without highlight, like the rain. "Have you heard the news yet?"

"News?" demanded Allerton as he went down the ramp to the apron and was soon swallowed up by the sea of umbrellas.

"You're Allerton, aren't you?"

An aisle was cleared as Allerton drew a slicker from his duffle and pulled it across his shoulders. Flash-cameras glared briefly against the dusky sky, making him blink his eyes uncomfortably.

"Yes, I'm Allerton, but I haven't heard any news."

It was a woman's voice this time, sharp and precise as a pencil point. "The *Eros* was gone for three

years, Mr. Allerton, on a one year trip. Sixteen months ago you were presumed to be lost. You were legally dead a year ago."

"Here I am," said Allerton foolishly. "Here we are." He wished they would all go away so he could check in at the administration building. He thought that the copter-cabs might be grounded by the low ceiling and realized his homecoming, two years tardy, would be delayed still further because it would take him hours to get home to his wife and son. "We had some trouble in the Jovian Moons," he said unnecessarily, for the rest of the crew must have made that fact known by now. "Really, I'm no hero."

It had been largely through Allerton's efforts, as noncommissioned officer in charge of maintenance and repair, that the *Eros* had been able to blast off from Io at all. It was a moment he had not considered, this hero's welcome. His picture and the story of his exploits might appear on the video newscasts even before he reached Nancy and the boy. But now that he had stooped low to be included in the protection of the umbrellas, he could see the faces of the reporters.

This was no hero's welcome. Allerton waited for what was to come

with a growing sense of the ridiculous. He had been almost ready to sign autographs.

"Hasn't anyone told you your wife has re-married, Mr. Allerton?"

The rain marched across the umbrellas with incessantly scurrying feet. The space below them was heavy with cigarette smoke, like a small, poorly-ventilated room, and with the muted sound of many voices, keyed low—anxious but objective. Allerton could almost see the scores of pencils, ready to pounce upon the blank pages of the ruled pads and scribble his name across the hemisphere, the world.

"What are you telling me?" demanded Allerton. He had heard. Even now the words were etching themselves in his brain, stirring old memories, conjuring impossible visions. This was the sort of thing you saw on the video-casts and tch-tch'd about, then went upstairs with your wife and took her in your arms and thought, are the people that happens to real?

"Mrs. Allerton was married again ten months ago. In an interview this morning she said she was glad you were alive but loved her husband, her new husband I mean, that is, the man she married because she thought you were dead." It was the girl reporter

again, the brittle, pencil-point quality gone from her voice.

Allerton subdued a wild impulse to say something flippant. Suddenly, it was as if he had indeed died out there in space and now he was a ghost, coming home to haunt people who wanted only to forget. The reporters expected him to say something, though. Tell them that he had spent three years in space, hating every minute of it, to find security for his family? Tell them he had risked his life to repair the ship on Io because if he failed the government insurance would provide for his family? Tell them he was now dead, really dead as Nancy had thought, and they were wasting their time interviewing a ghost?

"Have you any plans, Mr. Allerton?"

"I'm sorry, I didn't hear you." The rain had slackened. He heard his own heart, hammering in his throat and ears.

"What are your plans for the future, Mr. Allerton? Are you going to contest the marriage legally? Will you see your wife at all?"

"I don't know," said Allerton mechanically. "I don't know. I don't know. I don't know." He pushed his way through the crowd of reporters, a tall but stooped figure, averting his eyes from the

umbrella ribs. He had been married to Nancy only six months before shipping out, had received word about the birth of their son at the last mail-station on Ceres. If she sought the same security he wanted, he could not find it in his heart to condemn her. He was dead. He had been waiting to live all his life, but now he was dead.

"ALL right, spacer. On your feet. We're closing."

His bleary eyes squinted. *It was Johnny this and Johnny that and Johnny . . .* Kipling? Someone?

"We got nothing against spacers here, only when we close, we close. I'll make you something to eat if you want, but that's it."

"No. No, thank you."

"A bit too much to drink, eh?"

"I'll be O.K. I'm sorry if I—"

"Forget it. Here, let me help you to the door. Easy, now."

He was outside, the duffle balanced on his lean shoulder, the misty drizzle chilling him at once, the wet sidewalk casting his reflection and alternately swallowing and elongating his shadow as he made his way down the street past the spaced lamplights.

Sooner or later, he would see her. He had to see her and the child, who was now almost three years old. But what did you do, walk in

the front door and say hello Mrs. (name of new husband), I'm the man you used to be married to? Perhaps, he thought, you wrote a letter instead, a dear-John in reverse. But that way you did not get to see the boy.

Certainly, you saw none of your old friends. Tough luck, old fellow. Something about more fish in the sea. Pat your back and introduce you to two or three one-tracked-minded bachelor girls as the conquering hero from Io and other faraway places. And you did not even venture into the old neighborhood until you were ready for the quick sally, the first visit to Nancy and the boy (and the new husband?) and departure.

Nancy loved her husband, the girl-reporter said. Nancy had loved him. Simple logic: Nancy loved husbands, present tense. Security. What he sought. Safe in a circumscribed world, in comfortable, middle-class conformity, free and clear of all intrusions except the mortgage and the payments on the new copter and scraped knees for junior.

He wondered how many bars he had visited, starting with the spaceport administration building. There was a hazy recollection of copter-cabs and surface-cabs, of smiling, vapid faces and other smil-

ing faces, not vapid, when the video-cast appeared on a television screen in one of the bars and there he was, squinting against the flash-camera glare, the rain seeping through the roof of umbrellas and rolling down his long, gaunt face and off the thin, long, drooping nose. And then someone recognized him or he recognized himself and drunkenly announced his identity, he wasn't sure which, and someone had bought drinks for everyone celebrating Allerton's return to blessed bachelorhood and they all had a fine old time except Allerton who had soon taken his leave and another cab and another bar.

Now the streets were familiar. There was the long, low bulk of the pie-wedge supermarket, big and wide in front and tapering in the rear, with great sweep of thermoglass window staring at him and reflecting him in the lamplight so he could stare at himself.

And there was the schoolyard playground, deserted now, the swings wet and the teeter-totters dripping and the slicky-slide glistening. What does a man think about when he's out in space and knows he probably won't return? thought Allerton. About slicky-slides and a boy hollering in glee with an unknown voice out of an unknown face. And there were the

apartment buildings, flanking their courtyard with the look of solid strength that only brick can give in this age of glass and plaster. He wondered if Nancy still had their old Republic family-copter parked on the roof near the television antenna, and then it suddenly occurred to him that Nancy might not be living here at all.

He wouldn't visit her, not yet. It was curiosity and not longing which made him enter the courtyard and the lobby of the second building on the left, past the dark, perfectly-cropped rows of California privet which in another few months would lose their glossy leaves to the coming of winter.

The illuminated dial of his wrist-watch told him it was 0230, hardly the time to go calling on a woman and her new husband and a child he had never seen. But there was the name; his name, opposite the apartment number on the call-phone. Allerton, with a hyphen after it, and the name Chambers. The widow Allerton lived here with her new husband, the legally declared widow Allerton who probably still received some mail and some callers under the old name but would one day soon be able to take Allerton and the hyphen out and leave Chambers alone. Nancy Chambers, his wife.

He pressed the buzzer and then drew back, startled. He was about to leave the lobby and run out between the rows of privet and keep on running when he heard his wife's voice, metallically, over the call-phone. "Yes? Who is it?"

He walked back and stared at the rows of names and buzzers. "Harry," he said.

There was a sob, a sucking in of breath. "I'll come right down."

"I'm coming up."

It was simple. It was as simple as waiting for the buzzer, opening the door, waiting for the elevator, pressing another button, waiting to be carried to the twelfth floor, waiting for the door to slide, walking across the hall to the apartment door, waiting for it to open, waiting, waiting, waiting.

"I HOPED you would come, Harry. Really, I wanted to see you. You're looking well."

"You're looking well, too." She was. She wore a dressing gown of some gossamer material over her flannel pajamas. She'd never liked nightgowns.

"Nice trip back?"

"Long one."

"Weather bad? No, there's no weather up there."

"I can't complain."

"Did you have anything to eat?"

"Don't bother. I only wanted to say hello." Goodbye, he meant.

"Harry's asleep now."

"Harry?"

"Your son."

"Oh."

"He goes to bed at eight o'clock."

He made the automatic adjustment. Twenty hundred hours. "Is he well?"

"Couldn't be better. Eats well and everything."

"Like his old man, huh?"

"You want to come in?" But she stood blocking the doorway.

"No, don't bother. Have you a solidio of him or something?"

"I'll get it."

He stood there in the hall, awkwardly, waiting.

She came back. "Here."

The other Harry was a dimple-cheeked boy with blond hair and a small nose like his mother's. He was wearing a junior spaceman's suit and pointed a ray gun straight at you.

"Thank you."

"Sure you don't want anything to eat?" She wore a pleasant enough expression on her face, the same as she might use for a door to door solicitor or a visiting great-aunt from out of town.

"That's all right. I want to wish you good luck, Nancy."

"Thank you. Are you sure you don't want . . ." And then the pleasant look melted before tears, not slowly but all at once, so that this was a different person standing in the doorway and Harry Allerton wanted either to take her in his arms and comfort her or flee for the elevator but nothing in between. "Harry . . . Harry . . . I didn't know . . . I couldn't . . . we never . . ."

"That's all right," he said, settling for the in between and abruptly hating himself not for what was within him but for what was outside, for the world and its conventions and the things he had wanted to do but never could and the security he had wanted to earn but which now had eluded him.

"I'm sorry I carried on so," said Nancy, the conventional smile returning, the tears kleenex'd away.

"If there is something little Harry needs . . . ?"

"Oh, no, thank you. His father, I mean my husband—Mr. Chambers is an engineer over at Grumman and everything is fine."

"I guess I'll be going."

"I'm glad you could come."

"Does the boy know about me?"

"No. I thought it would be better."

"Of course, Nancy. You did the right thing."

"I was hoping you would think so."

"You couldn't do anything else."

"Where will you go now? Are you going to make a career of space?"

"I haven't thought about it. There's no hurry."

"Well . . ."

"Well . . ."

"I hope you get whatever you want, Harry."

He wanted to say it no longer was available. "A man doesn't know what he wants, until he has it."

"Well . . ."

"Goodbye, Nancy."

"Goodbye, Harry."

The door shut. He fled with his picture.

"COME in, Allerton. Nice vacation?" Captain Greene peered at him through a blue haze of cigar smoke.

"Not particularly. There are too many people. Too many complications. A man can't think straight out there, with all that confusion. I don't know . . ."

"I said you were for space. When you've been around as long as I have, you'll be able to smell 'em, too. You think I'm kidding?"

"Probably not, sir."

"There is security and security, Allerton. It can't be explained to a man. He's got to find out for himself. Alone in space, with the ship and a frontier vaster than all the frontiers before it in history, a certain type of man can be secure. He's the man who's lost in a crowd. Confused and muddled by convention, he's not a hero. Basically, he's a lonesome man. Strangely, the psychologists tell you he's happy then — when he's lonesome. You see what I mean, Allerton?"

"No, sir. Not entirely."

"Forget that formal stuff. Well, you'll learn. The important thing is this: there aren't enough real spacemen to go around. A normal man doesn't give up life for dedication. A spaceman does. You belong to a strange breed, Allerton. Want to talk about your vacation?"

"Absolutely not," Allerton said curtly, then apologized. The thought of it, the thought of stepping off the *Eros* again and feeling the ground of Earth underfoot, wet ground sometimes, or dry and dusty, or covered with a white mantle of snow, always unpredictable, was distasteful.

"You're one of the breed now," the captain repeated.

* * *

"YOU may close the Allerton file," said the government psychologist to his secretary.

"It's finished?"

"We paid his wife a visit yesterday. They're the hardest ones to deal with. The man never knows, but the woman does. How can you convince a woman her husband will be happiest away from her—how can you convince her when you're not even sure yourself?"

"I feel sorry for Allerton. You can't help feeling sorry for him."

"But psychological tests indicate he'll be happier this way. Besides—"

"—besides," the secretary finished for him, "it's for the good of the nation. But never mind those psychological tests. Don't have to tell me which came first, the chicken or the egg."

"Have it your way. But Mrs. Allerton understood."

"After we worked on her night and day for three years!"

"Nevertheless, she understood. Allerton is a special breed, a spaceman. Well, isn't he?"

"And Mrs. Allerton playing

along with us like that, pretending she had re-married—"

"It was the best way. She knew that."

"We convinced her of that. But forget it, chief. I'd rather not talk about it. Still, Allerton wasn't a born spaceman, and you know it. There's no such thing, except for extreme introverts, who aren't such good workers, anyway."

"We need spacemen. We need dedicated men who don't want to see their native planet. Either we control space or our enemy does."

"Then why don't you say it that way?"

"Well, because—"

"Because you're afraid to admit it even to yourself, that's why. Spacemen aren't born, chief. They are made. They are not particularly heroic or well-adjusted people. They are ordinary men with induced traumas and they don't want to go near Earth again, and we call them spacemen."

"It's for the security of the nation," said the government psychologist as he opened a new file . . .

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MAY ISSUE ON SALE AT YOUR NEWSSTAND MARCH 26TH

Journey For The Brave

By

Alan E. Nourse

Courage will be a big qualification for the pilot who flies the first moon rocket. But who decides if a man is brave — or a coward? . . .

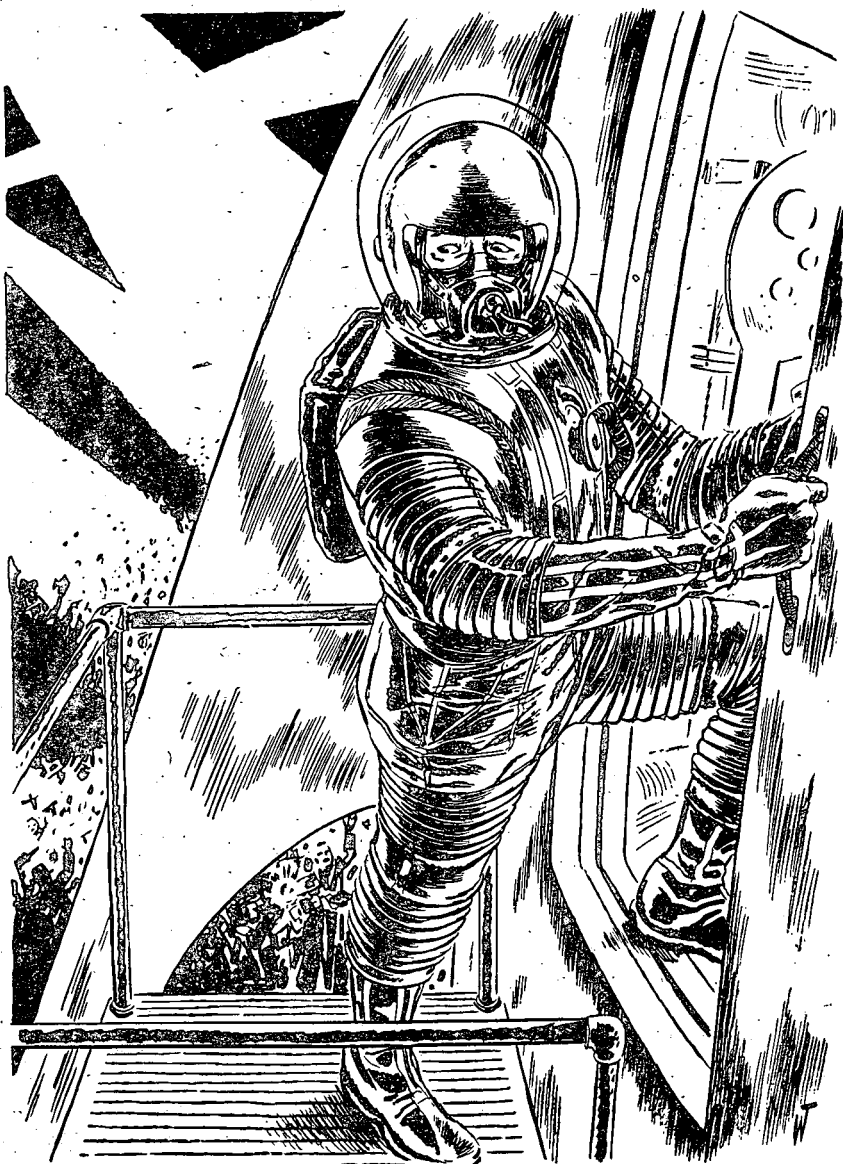
THE base diner was hot and stuffy that night as Scotty Johnson sat with Mitch and Jack and the other boys, sipping his last cup of coffee before Zero Hour rolled around. Mitch and Jack had succeeded in sneaking him out of town before the reporters had guessed what was happening. Now they sat in silence, sipping their coffee, glancing at him from time to time as though to make sure he were still there. It annoyed Scotty. This was the time to laugh, and joke, and bull away as if nothing was going to happen at all.

The waitress trotted over with a coffee pot, and Scotty gave her his widest leer. "You know, I can't think of anything I'd rather have right now than a cup of coffee from you," he said. "How about a date in about ten days?"

The girl looked startled, and glanced away nervously. Mitch gave a tight little laugh. "Better watch out, Scotty. She's liable to be waiting on the landing field when you get back—"

They all laughed at that, and then silence fell again. They were nervous. Scotty could sense it, even though they tried to cover it up. All through these weeks of preparation in the hot New Mexico sun, the tension had been growing. But *he* should be the one to be nervous, not these lads. After all, who was the star of this show? Scotty nuzzled his coffee, and twisted his wiry five-foot-two inch frame around so that he could see the door. "Better drink up," he said. "The jeep should be here any minute."

Mitch nodded and emptied his cup as the jeep's tires screeched on



the pavement outside. The door of the coffeeshop burst open, and a head with an MP's crash helmet popped in. "All set, Scotty? Let's go!"

Scotty nodded. His blue eyes were bright as he buttoned up his jacket and winked at the waitress. Then he led the group to the door. "Love that gal," he said.

The driver raced the motor as they piled in, and the jeep took off down the concrete strip with a roar. The driver turned an admiring glance toward Scotty. "All set for the big trip, man?"

Scotty grinned. "Been sleeping in a coffin all week, just for practice."

"Man, you may need that practice. You'll be good and stiff before you get out—" He broke off, horrified at the pun.

Scotty roared with glee. "You think you're kidding! That's all right—the way I see it, I'm getting ten days vacation on the Government, and plenty of pay besides. And once I get up there, I won't need much muscle to make my way around, they tell me." He lit a cigarette, peering down the strip ahead of them. Far ahead he could see the batteries of searchlights, picking out the tall, shiny spire of the ship. It stood tall in its scaffolding, pointing like a needle toward the black star-lit sky.

Already the ground below it was swarming with tiny figures, moving about on the final check-down. My ship, thought Scotty. I helped to build it. And here's one job where they need a cocky, loud-mouthed little shrimp more than anything else in the world—

ANOTHER jeep swerved in beside them on the strip. Scotty caught a glimpse of the General and a couple of official-looking civilians.

"Everybody's going to see you off," said Mitch from the back seat.

"Yeah — the whole damned crowd. My big day."

"You sure you got everything down cold?"

Scotty gave him a scornful glance. "You kidding? How could I miss?" His freckled face broke into a grin from ear to ear, and his eyes were bright with excitement. "Why I've got nothing to do but crawl in and zip things up after me. Don't even have to throw the fatal switch—they take care of everything from outside. I'm telling you, it's a cinch. Three days to tell myself sea stories—and then I'll crawl out and tell you boys what Lady Moon *really* looks like."

A crowd of reporters and photographers were waiting as the jeep

sped up to the huge barbed-wire enclosure surrounding the ship. Scotty stuck his head out of the jeep and gave them a big grin. The flashbulbs popped. Then the jeep roared on toward the field shack. Scotty stepped out, staring up at the tall sleek ship. A little bottom-heavy now, perhaps, but with the first and second stages disengaged—a beauty of a ship. He stepped into the field shack, and grinned up at the General. “Final check go all right?”

The General nodded and smiled. “This is the Secretary of Defense, Scotty—”

“Well! Guess I’m rating big visitors tonight!” He gave the man’s hand a jaunty shake.

“You’re taking a big trip,” said the Secretary. “Tell me, Mr. Johnson—how does it feel to be the first man to go to the Moon?”

“Can’t say. I haven’t been there yet.”

“You’d better get aboard,” said the General. “Everything’s been checked down. You’ll have half an hour to make your own checks from inside. How’s your weight?”

“Down to 128.”

“Fine. That’s better than we’d hoped. But don’t be afraid to holler if something doesn’t look right—” He extended his hand, gripped Scotty’s tightly. “Good luck, lad. We’re with you all the way.”

A soldier rode up the gantry with him, high up past the breaklines of the first and second stages, to the small open port in the final stage of the rocket. Scotty could feel the eyes on him from below as he climbed into the port—one lone man to jockey the first manned ship to the Moon. A big job, a job that really took guts. He grinned, and slid through into the passenger chamber. Carefully he reached back and slammed the port shut behind him with a farewell wave to the soldier, and gave the lock-wheel a spin, until he heard the seal click. Then he slipped down into the half-sitting, half-reclining couch which nearly filled the tiny chamber. His heart was pounding in his throat as he snapped on the radio phone. “Okay, I’m in,” he said.

“Got her locked up?” Mitch’s voice grated in his earphones.

“Ay, ay.”

“Give her a careful check inside there. Then stand by.”

Scotty nodded and checked the banks of instruments on the tiny panel before him. He was the payload on this trip; the ship was little more than an upholstered tube, with him jammed tight in one end and enough fuel to land him on the Moon and shoot him off again in behind him. The other sections, far huger than this little

pellet, with him in the middle, would drive him out, break the frightful hold that Earth held on her subjects. But there was nothing superfluous here, nothing he did not actually need, and he checked quickly. Then he leaned back and flipped on the forward televisioner . . .

The vast black expanse of space, peppered with a thousand bright pinpoints of light, suddenly appeared on the screen inches from his face. It took him by surprise; his hand jerked down on the switch again, and he wiped a line of droplets from his upper lip, and closed his eyes, his heart pounding against his ribs.

The radio blipped in his ear. "Thirty minutes to Zero," it said—

IT struck Scotty Johnson, then, how very much alone he was.

He felt a chill go down his spine, and he turned his eyes about the tiny chamber. Forward, within arm's length, was the dull glint of metal panelling and coiled wires and tight atmosphere sealing. His small wiry body sank against the deep couch, and he drew the safety webbing across his chest and thighs, the chill in his mind deepening. Above him was another pad of soft material to protect his head; his feet were lodged against a solid bar at the foot of the couch.

Inevitably, he thought of a cocoon. A tight, soft, warm cocoon. And he was alone inside it—

He tried to think when, in all his thirty-four years, he had been so completely and utterly alone.

He sat very still, listening. All about him was silence. A muted, deathly silence. His head-set pressed tight against his ears, and he shook his head, wondering if he had actually heard the words coming into his ears a few seconds before. Zero minus thirty minutes. Thirty minutes to wait, alone—

Suddenly, he knew that he was very much afraid—

His lips formed a sneer, and he tried to fight the idea out of his mind. He was no longer afraid of anything. Those days were gone, far away. Nothing could scare Scotty Johnson—not even being completely alone. He reached out his hand, ran a finger over the control board. Oxygen, chamber pressure, emergency anaesthetic, blast-control—his hand trembled, and the thought seeped back into his mind again. A voice was whispering, deep in his ear, *you're afraid, little man, afraid—!* He could feel the droplets of moisture forming on his forehead, and even the sound of his breath was muted in the silent chamber.

The seconds ticked by. Still the voice whispered. He was alone.

—alone and afraid. No one could help him now, no one in the world. This was his own world, here in this tight little cabin, and he could die here and nobody would ever know—

He shook his head savagely. Alone? Ridiculous! At the foot of the ship were a hundred people, all watching, all thinking about him. They had built this ship, they were for him all the way. They would get him safely off the ground, and then it would be just like a subway ride—

But after the blast-off — what then? The hundred men were staying behind. There were no men where he was going. There was nothing there. Nothing but death.

His breath was coming faster, and he felt the first chill of panic stir in his mind. He tried to fight it down angrily. What was there to get excited about? Nobody had forced him into this seat. He'd begged for it! For five long years it had been an obsession, his wildest dream, to be sitting in this seat, waiting for the Zero-count to come through the headphones. Years of hoping, of pulling strings, of talking to people and dropping-chance remarks, of studying and working and practicing—and finally, the note in his box, the trip down to the General's field office that day.

INSIDE the office the General had sat down, regarding him for a long moment with those cool grey eyes of his. Then he said, "You're sure you want to do this, Scotty? Dead sure?"

Scotty had nodded, hardly able to find his voice. "I'd give anything. You've got to let me go."

The General nodded slowly. "You might have to give your life. Does it mean that much to you? Millions of dollars have gone into this ship, but there's no way to be sure of it. It's a fearful gamble."

"I'll take any odds, General. The sheep and the chickens came back. I'll come back."

The General looked out the window, his face carved with weary lines. "I hate to send a man, alone. But what we need to know, one man can find out. Two would be a waste—a tragic waste. The sheep and chickens didn't land, they just circled. But one man must go up, to land a ship, and take off again, for the first time." His eyes caught Scotty's gravely. "I want you to know why it's got to be you alone. We can't gamble on two men's lives, when one will do. *You're the guinea pig!*"

Scotty had stood up then, laughing. "Are you trying to frighten me? Look, General—I've been working on this ship since it first started. I know it inside out and

backwards. I'm not afraid of this trip. I've got to be the one to go."

The General had shifted some papers on his desk. "All right. They weighed you in at 142 pounds. Our calculations call for 135. Every ounce over that cuts a hard percentage out of your fuel. You'll have to suck down."

"I can do that."

"All right—but don't starve yourself. And don't dehydrate any more than you absolutely must. You'll have enough water for ten days, no more. Three up, three back, four there. Now then. The psych boys will go to work on your coordination for the next few days. That's critical. The first and second stages will disengage automatically, but you'll have to maneuver your own landing."

Scotty nodded. "I've been maneuvering dummies until I'm blue in the face."

"You'll need it pounded in."

"It's pounded; don't worry."

The General gave a satisfied nod. "All right, Scotty. See you at the blast-off. And remember, if you want to pull out—nobody will blame you. Right down to the last minute before Zero, you can pull out—"

"I don't think so," said Scotty. "I don't think I'm going to pull out. Not on this one."

"ZERO minus twenty minutes —"

The harsh metallic voice dragged Scotty back to the present with a jolt. For a moment he had almost regained the old familiar burn of self-assured bravado he had felt as he had finished talking to the General that day and sauntered out toward the ship standing in the launching scaffold. He had even been smiling as he recalled the interview—

But now his eye caught the dull gleam of the control board before him, and his smile faded.

The voice was whispering softly, deep inside his head: *Come off it, Scotty. Who are you trying to kid?*

His hand trembled, and he leaned back, forcing his tense leg muscles to relax. What do you mean, who am I trying to kid? he thought, angrily. You're crazy. Would I be kidding myself? I quit kidding myself years ago. I know what I'm up to. This is a journey for heroes, and I'm going to be the hero, this time. *For sure.* This time there won't be any doubt. *They* won't have any doubt, and *I* won't have any doubt—

You're alone, Scotty. Remember? You can quit acting now.

He shuddered, and glanced uneasily around the tiny closed chamber. Alone? What a laugh. A man can never be alone. There are

always a million memories, wheeling and spinning and roaring around inside your head. Memories of people, of hopes and dreams and fears. You can build a heavy wall in your mind to keep them back, but when you're alone, and scared, and helpless, the wall starts to crumble down—

There's nobody to fool any more, Scotty. The act is over. Admit it, you're scared, *you can hardly hold still you're so scared—*

He clapped his hands to his ears, trying to shut out the whisper. He kept shaking his head, but it came through like a heavy surf. He sat tense, trembling, with salty droplets pouring down his face, shaking his head helplessly—

You're caught now, the voice whispered. This is a one-way ride, and you know it, and you're scared—

"I'm not!"

The earphones clicked. "You say something, Scotty?"

Scotty took a deep breath, unclenching his hands. "No, no—nothing. What's the Zero-count; Mitch?"

"Zero minus sixteen minutes. Everything set?"

"All set. I wish we could get going." Scotty twisted on the couch, feeling the silence close down around him like a stifling blanket. He was almost shouting

to himself. All right, I'm scared! Wouldn't anybody be scared? Sitting here, waiting, thinking about two hundred thousand miles of nothing with a rocky world of death at the other end to land on? Why shouldn't I be scared? They can stay back here, and track me with their scopes and radar—it's fine for them. It's fine for the Secretary of Defense, too—no skin off his back if something happens. And the big boys in Hollywood can sit back at their desks and rub their fat hands together and hope their cameras work all right, hope the pictures come out good, so they can make their pile, *if I get back*. Big gamble for them. FIRST MOON PICTURES RELEASED—SEE MAN'S GREATEST ADVENTURE IN GLORIOUS TECHNICOLOR—AUTHENTIC FILMS FROM THE FIRST MOON ROCKET—PRICES ONLY SLIGHTLY ADVANCED. Big gamble. Those films will help pay for a lot of fuel, a lot of metal and man-hours spent on this ship—

But can it pay for a life?

BITTERNESS swept through Scotty's mind, sharply. It was *his* life they were bartering, *he* was to be the star of those films—dead or alive. He could be killed in the blast-off, and the films

would keep rolling, keep churning out the yardage, and thirty years later they could pick up the film and still make their nice safe pile—thirty years of cold death for him—

But why are you whining now, little man? Why all the tears, all of a sudden? You asked for it. You made your bed, right from scratch. You wanted to be the hero, nothing else would do. Well, here you are, Hero. Tough. You asked for it—

But *why?*

And then something was tugging at his mind, seeping through the heavy wall of memory. A terrible, loathsome thought. He shook his head, desperately, trying to fight it back, but the wall began to crumble. Long-dead pictures began drifting through, long-hidden memories. A bare whisper of thought, cold, relentless, devastating. Admit it, Scotty. *You had to come.* You had to be sitting in this seat; you couldn't do anything else, could you? You couldn't let them know about you. You couldn't bear to let the boys down on the field suspect the truth, could you, Scotty?—You looked into their eyes, and you were afraid they suspected, like Matty had suspected, like Dad had suspected so many years ago—You had to come here. *You couldn't help yourself, could*

you?—

The whisper broke into a coarse, derisive laugh, and Scotty cowered back, shaking his head in denial, his whole body trembling. *Take a look, Scotty—take a good look!* Are you trying to hide the truth from *yourself*? But you can't get away with that. You can't hide it from yourself any longer—

And then the wall of memory buckled, and split wide open. You can fool the whole world, Scotty—but you can't fool yourself, the voice screamed in his ear. You can run, and hide, and twist, and lie, but you can't ever really fool yourself. You know it's true. You always have known.

You're a coward, Scotty. A dirty yellow coward. You always have been, and you always will be—

"Zero minus ten minutes—"

IT wasn't true. He shook his head helplessly as his fingers found the safety belts, tightened them down fiercely on his chest and legs. Wasn't he sitting here now, waiting for the last count, waiting to start on the greatest adventure man had ever attempted? Would he be *here* if he were a coward? He snarled and clenched his fists tight on the arm-rests. It was a lie, it *couldn't* be true. No man can stare himself in the face and call himself a coward when there

is a spark of life left in him at all. He can call himself a cheat, or a liar, or a fake—those were things that could be changed, things that could be made up for. But a coward had something wrong deep inside, something that was built in, that could never be changed as long as a man lived. No man could call himself *that*.

Scotty shook his head, half laughing, half crying. He was scared, sure. Anybody would be scared. But he wasn't a coward. He was in this ship because he wanted fame, because he craved excitement and adventure. Nothing had made him volunteer. He'd done it because he was that kind of guy—

But he knew that was a lie. Its very falsehood writhed in his brain as he thought it. You're here because your cheap, cowardly little soul couldn't bear to face itself. You're here because you couldn't bear the looks of the men around you, with their barbed wise-cracks and their guarded half-smiles. They thought you couldn't see them! But the whispers were there, and you couldn't stand for them to guess—

But what did he care what *they* thought? What were they to him? He knew he was better than they were—quicker, smarter, braver. He didn't have to prove anything to

them—

And Matty? Does Matty know how brave you are, Hero? Can you prove to Matty that you're not a coward? Matty knows about you. Remember?

Scotty shook his head, fearfully. That was so long ago—

But things like that are never long ago, Scotty. They stay with you as long as you live. Sure, the Army said you were a hero, they gave you a Silver Star—but what would Matty say—if he could ever say anything again? Would *he* say you were a hero?

Suddenly Matty's torn and twisted face seemed to be peering out at him from the control panel. His mind went whirling back through the years, completely out of control. In an instant he had slipped back fifteen long years, back to the hot, stinking sweaty deadliness of that little jungle island. They had been deep in the jungle that night, holed in, scared to move, afraid even to breathe. For a week they had been waiting, waiting for the snipers to move in and spot them. He could remember the cold, desperate fear that had gnawed at him that night as he and Bill Matthews had clutched their rifles, waiting, creeping forward along the jungle trail through the blackness and the night sounds. His clothes had stuck to

his body with sweat as they crept, the sweat of mortal fear. The mosquitoes whined in clouds around his head; his body stung with a thousand insect bites. Up ahead, somewhere in the sticky blackness, was a machine-gun, blocking them from their supplies, blocking them from the plasma and penicillin powder the patrol needed more than any food or water. They had been waiting for many days, and they were weak with hunger and thirst—but there was a gun, and sharp, cruel eyes watching—

THEY had been moving in pairs, and Scotty had felt the fear clutching his chest, fear beyond any words. He and Matty were working their way down a swampy river bottom, sliding on their bellies in the muck, when they had spotted the nest. And then the fear and panic building up inside him had broken through. He had jumped up, screaming, and burst forward, gun chattering in his hand.

Blind rage and fear drove him forward as the startled gunners swivelled their gun, piercing the night with their sharp cries. Matty had shouted at him to get down, but he ran forward in the darkness, wildly. A burst of fire screamed out at him through the jungle; he slid into the mud, pant-

ing, still firing into the face of the blazing machine gun, until he saw the last man twist, and fall, and the gun fell silent.

A hero, they said. But later he had found Matty, lying twisted with his head split open, a line of open holes cutting down through his neck and across his shoulders—

Another few seconds, another instant of control would have given them time to get the machine gun in crossfire. But something had exploded in Scotty's brain that night—a fear greater than any fear of being shot, a fear of being exposed for what he was, what he knew he was. He had dragged Matty back, through the long miles of sniper-ridden jungle, and they called him a hero, and he had never told them who had broken first and drawn the deadly fire—

His forehead stood out with sweat now, and he tried to hide his eyes. He had spent many years forgetting that horrible night, trying to cleanse himself of the depths of guilt that had eaten away at him—and now it was back, harsh and undeniable, intensified by years of self-deceit and self-justification and rationalization. But the chips were down now. In a few moments a great fire would explode deep in the bowels of this ship, and he would be driven forward, far out into space, along trails nev-

er blazed by man.

"Zero minus five minutes. Give her a final check, Scotty—"

He jerked in his seat as though he had been struck. *Five minutes!* His mind whirled with memories, and the cold fear cut through him like a knife. In a moment of panic his mind was screaming, get out, now, before it's too late! The General said you could pull out, right down to the last minute—well, *pull out, now, before the engines start—*

But a peal of derisive laughter roared through his mind. There had been reporters, news stories. He had said things that had been splashed across a million newspapers. Back out now? Tell the world what a coward he was? Then everybody would know—the boys down below, Matty, Dad—Dad had never actually *said* it, but it had always been there, as long as Scotty could remember. He had tried and tried to make up for his small size, for his skinny legs and bony chest.

It hadn't been his fault that Dad was such a big man, such a rugged, powerful man. Those long hunting trips up through Canada—a man had to share the load, there was no place for weakness and weariness there. And Dad had taken him along, once, until he had tired, and turned his ankle on a

short portage. They had carried him out—and he knew that he had lost his Dad that day. Dad hadn't admitted it, but it was true. There was always the half-hidden disgust and sadness and disappointment in his cool, grey eyes—

"Minus two, Scotty. Final check—"

His hand flicked out automatically, as fear and dismay welled up in his mind. Everything he had ever done he had flubbed, somehow—he searched frantically through his mind for one small, pure act of absolute bravery, unadorned by words, unaltered by empty rationalizations and built-up courage, and his mind yielded nothing but hoarse, heavy laughter. Somewhere there was a key. It had started somewhere, if only he could remember. Somewhere beneath the years of futile failure there was a core—

"Sixty seconds, Scotty — Good luck, boy!"

He froze, his hands clutching the safety belt in a grip of iron as the words pounded in his ear: "*—forty—thirty five—thirty—twenty five—*"

And then, like a great door opening up in his mind, he remembered—

A DAY so long ago, so deeply buried that it had not come

to mind in years. A day when he had been walking down a village street, on the way to the store for his mother, a small boy, hardly ten—

A group of boys, appearing suddenly from the old garage he was passing. A thin-faced lad, tall and sharp-boned, with cold eyes and a sneer on his thin lips. Other boys, too, mostly bigger than he. His eyes widened, and he started to back away when Thin-face grabbed his collar, pulled him up sharp. "Where you think you goin', bud?"

"Just down the street—"

"Who said you could walk on this street?"

"It's not your street. I can walk where I want—"

A gleam of cruelty in Thin-face's eyes. "Sissy thinks he's smart." A sharp-knuckled hand struck him across the nose. "You want to fight?"

Scotty shook his head, eyes wide. "No, I just want to—" His eye caught one of the others, sidling around behind him—

"Stand still!"

He had been paralyzed. The rabbit-punch struck him a hammer-blow, and tears streamed down his face. Thin-face hit him again, and blood spurted from his nose. "Put up your hands and fight—"

"I can't—"

"You'd better fight, sissy—I'll

kill ya!"

"I don't want to fight—" The fear, the mortification, the blind, paralyzing fear. Another blow struck him, and he tumbled backwards over the boy who had crouched behind him, and struck his head on the sidewalk. They had roared with laughter, and one of them kicked him. And then he was on his feet, darting between them, running for his life, running with blind fear snarling at his heels, down an alley, into a backyard, across into another alley— He had seen the open cellarway, then, and crawled down in, heart pounding in his throat, waiting as the boys came through the yard, looking, laughing at the sport, walking on. He waited for hours before he dared come out, and every minute of those hours he trembled, desperately sick and ashamed, wondering what Dad would ever think of him if he should find out—

SOMETHING struck him in the chest then, a firm, gentle pressure that grew and grew as the cabin vibrated with a powerful roar. The pressure grew larger, choking the breath from him. In a last terrible panic of fear Scotty tried to fight his safety belt open, tried to cry out to *stop, stop, stop*; but it was too late. He pressed

back, deeper and deeper into the couch as the age-long seconds ticked by—and in the viewer the Earth fell away, farther and farther, dwindling, dimming—

He heard the explosion as the first stage disengaged, and his mind froze as the pressure shoved harder at his chest. Then suddenly there was a jerk, a bone-crushing jar that nearly broke his neck, and the ship started spinning crazily.

"Scotty—Scotty, can you hear me?" It was Mitch's voice in the earphones, heavy with frantic urgency. "Can you hear me, Scotty?"

Scotty groaned. "I can hear you," he croaked.

"Scotty, the second stage didn't disengage properly—you've got it on your tail yet—"

Scotty gasped for breath, trying to focus his mind on the present, trying to drive out the paralyzing phantoms of the past. "Second—stage?"

"It—wait a minute—you're way off course—there it goes, you've lost it—" There was a scraping sound in the earphones, and then the General's voice snapped out, sharp and clear. "Scotty—listen, boy, you're off-course, you aren't out far enough—you'll have to orbit back—"

"Orbit?" The word was wrenching from his throat, and he stared

at the viewer in horror.

"Listen, Scotty, get this straight—can you hear me, lad?"

"Yeah, yeah, I can hear—"

"Then listen. Orbit your ship. Slam down the cut-off and—"

"I can correct," Scotty cried. "I can get back on beam, and make it—"

"Scotty, you'd use too much fuel. You didn't get out far enough, you dragged dead weight—"

"I can correct—"

"You'll never be able to land up there. If you do, you'll never be able to take off again—"

"I've—got—to—get—out—there!"

The General's voice was frantic. "This is an order, man. *Orbit your ship.* We'll find some way to get you down. But you'll have to come back—"

Something exploded in Scotty's mind then. Rage bubbled over in his mind, and he was screaming in the speaker, "I'm going on out. I'm going to land up there—I can't flub it now, I can't—"

"Scotty, *orbit while you can.* There'll be another try—"

"I can't hear you—"

"*I said—*"

"*I'm going out.* Get somebody up there to get me if you want to, but I'm going—"

He ripped off the earphones, the bitterness and rage and frustration

of long years welling into his mind. He was seething, almost crying out in his rage. Everything he had ever done he had flubbed—but he wouldn't flub this one. Fiercely, he went to work on the controls, tears rolling down his cheeks as he worked. He was going to go on, if it killed him—

HE felt the ship respond to its new course, slightly, and then, gradually, the weight began to lift from his chest. He sank back, panting. Up in the screen was a pale yellow ball, and he was racing toward it as fast as a man could race. There would be plenty of time for the sensitive calculations, for careful course-plotting, later. But he was not going back.

They might get a ship up to get him in time—and again, they might not. He had food and water for ten days at full rations. He could live for thirty days on it. Maybe more. And when the rations were gone, how long could he live then?

How long did we live in the jungle without food or water?

He sat back, then, and laughed. It would be better to die up there, than to spend the rest of his life dying down on Earth. Dying every day, a thousand thousand deaths—

They might be able to rescue him, with fast work, with a fearful margin of incredible luck. But it didn't really matter to him now whether they did or didn't. He knew that now. He had already died, back there on the ground, waiting for the zero count to come. He was reborn now, a new man with a great, courageous job to do. This time he would do the job right. Fear was behind him now, for he could never be afraid again like he had been afraid a few short minutes before. The gauntlet was run.

He would land on the Moon, and no man nor memory would stop him from doing it. No fear, no cowardice—

Because a coward would have turned back—

He settled back in the couch, and drifted into sleep with a peaceful smile on his lips.

THE END

FEATURED NEXT MONTH:—

THE GIANTS FROM OUTER SPACE

by **GEOFF ST. REYNARD**

Are there gigantic beings hiding in interstellar space? If so, what threat do they hold for Man when he ventures into the void? Don't miss this great action novell! May issue of **IMAGINATION** on sale March 26th.



Zephyr Tunnels

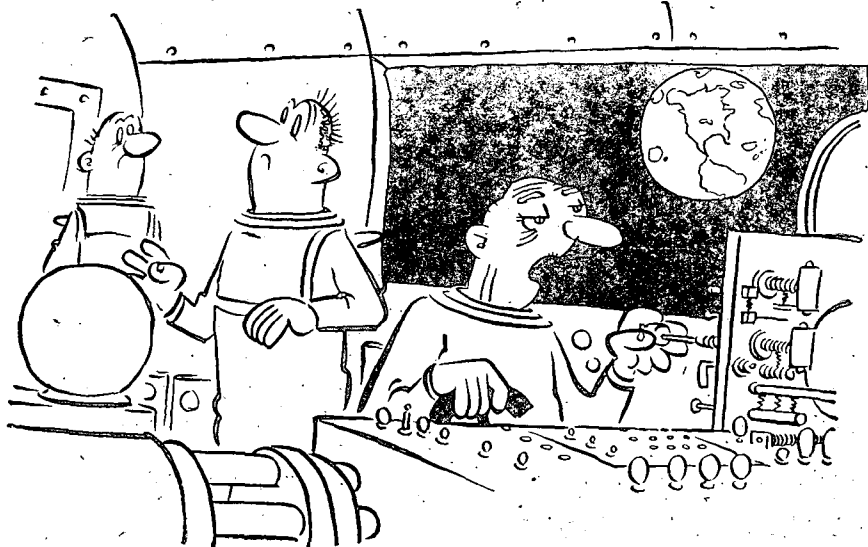


If you think all the world's scientific problems are solved in huge laboratories these days, consider that thousands of smaller—but just as important—difficulties require working out. A case in point is the matter of wind tunnels. Everyone knows of the huge wind tunnels through which rush hurricanes of air, designed for the study of jets and rockets. There are dozens of these in the world.

But what about "zephyr tunnels?" Are there any wind tunnels built for the study of slow

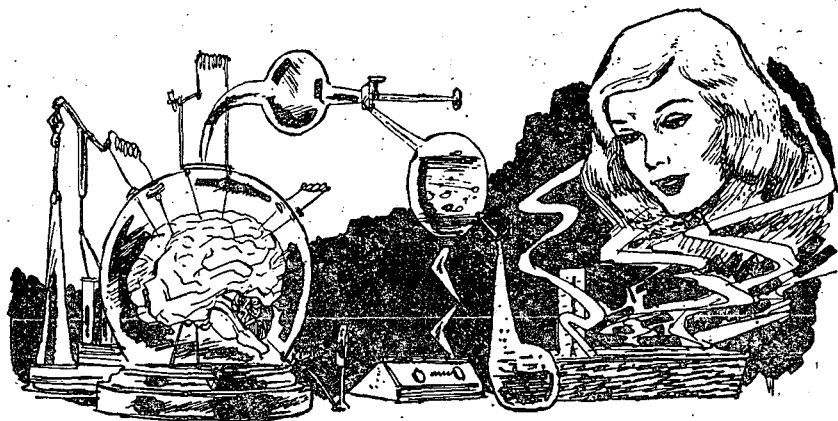
streams of air? The answer is, no.

You might wonder why anyone would want to know about slow air streams of ten feet per second. Air conditioning, heating and ventilating, certain types of aircraft, meteorology—a dozen different phenomena could use this kind of information. At present slow air flow is a by-guess and by-gosh affair. It needs scientific study. If anyone wants to conquer new worlds, let him build a "zephyr-tunnel", study scientifically the gentle breezes and make a name for himself!



G. LUDWAY

"Are we conserving fuel for WHAT return trip?"



The Disembodied Man

By

Larry Maddock

George remembered riding on the el with the sad girl across from him. Then there was nothing—nothing but blackness, and a voice . . .

THIS, he thought, is a crazy way to die.

"You're not dying, George. You're just beginning to live."

He started, tried to see her. I didn't say anything!

"Yes you did," she insisted, in that same low voice. "You said, 'This is a crazy way to die.'"

George tried to prop himself up

on his elbows—but suddenly he realized that he had no elbows!

"Don't worry, George. Just rest. You'll be all right."

How—where am I?

"Just rest," she repeated, and then she was gone. George thought about her for a long time, before dropping off to sleep.

* * *

It was a cold night, and lonely, for George Jameson. He paced the floor of his apartment, back and forth, into the kitchen, into the hall, through the bedroom, back and forth.

"God!" he said, although there was no one there to hear him. "Two years! And where am I?"

Angrily, he reached for his coat. Maybe some fresh air would do him good. He buttoned the coat, fumbled for his overcoat.

Then he walked outdoors.

It was snowing. The clean, white, slippery kind of snow that stays for a while, then quickly turns into Chicago slush. Instinctively, he turned his collar up against the cold, and headed for the El, a sentimental relic of the 20th century just past.

The snow was coming down in big, lazy flakes that caught themselves in the wind and buffeted against his overcoat. Streetlights cast weird shadows across the white. George could hear the faint *crunch-crunch* his shoes made. Half-turning he looked at his tracks behind him.

"Damn white stuff!" He hunched his shoulders more, pulled his neck down into the folds of his collar. "Puts a pure clean blanket over the whole world—but all you have to do is walk on it and you can see the dirt underneath!"

George climbed the steps to the elevated, bought a ticket to anywhere. Then he sat down and waited for a train.

There was a girl waiting with him. She was pretty. George watched her until the train pulled in, wondering what she was doing wandering around Chicago at this time of night.

She got on the train with him, sat down in the seat across from him. The train whined into motion.

"Hello," she said after a while.

"Hello," he replied, startled by her voice. *People on elevated trains don't go around saying "hello" to each other!*

"Do you mind awfully much if I talk to you?"

"Go ahead." *Nor he thought, do they ask such questions of strange men.*

"Do you ever get lonely here in Chicago?"

George smiled. "Sometimes," he said. "You lonely, kid?"

"Awfully. I like to talk to strangers. Then I don't feel quite so lonely."

"Oh."

She was quiet for a minute, her eyes friendly, but her trim body stiff against the city.

"Don't let the town get you down, kid." He was giving *her* advice!

She looked at him wistfully. — *if I did or not. Is it morning?*
 “Maybe it’s not so bad. Only the people who are fitted to live in a world like this keep on living. There are a lot of people who don’t see it the way we do.”

“Could be.” She was a strange girl, he thought, to be talking this way. Young, pretty, and fed up already. “Why do you ride the El at night?” he asked.

She smiled. “I can meet people — other lonely people — who don’t know me and don’t want to pry. I can talk to people, and learn things. And then I never see them again. I can’t talk to people in a crowd.”

Through the windows he could see the lights of a sleeping city flash by like speeding fireflies. “Never thought of it that way,” he said.

Suddenly, without warning, the hurtling elevated car leaped under him. He was thrown to the floor as the car jumped the tracks and twisted upon itself. George saw the lights go off and heard the girl scream — and then her scream was cut off, sharply, by the grinding, tearing crunch of impact.

Blackness.

“GOOD morning, George. Did you sleep well?”

There she was again — that soft, quiet voice! *Sleep? I don’t know*

“Yes — a beautiful morning.” Her voice was like lilacs, George thought. Sweet, soft lilacs.

“Lilacs? Thank you, George.”
Go away! I don’t want you to hear my thinking.

“Then don’t sub-vocalize. Don’t worry, you’ll soon get the hang of it. Just think without trying to move your tongue and your lips, and I can’t hear you.”

Where am I?

“You’re in a hospital.” Her voice was gentle, soft.

And you?

“I’m Karen — your nurse, George.”

How bad am I? I mean — I remember being on an elevated train when it crashed..

“You’re going to be all right. The doctors will have you all put back together again. You just need some new parts.”

It was that bad, huh?

“You almost died. But you’re alive now. Please get well, George.”

What kind of shape am I in?

She didn’t answer immediately. “How do you feel?”

I — I don’t feel! What’s the matter! — I can’t feel my body! I — Where is my body!

“George, please try to understand. You’re safe, you’re alive. You’re not crazy, and this isn’t a nightmare . . .”

Where is my body? He tried to scream it, but no sound came.

"Please, listen to me. You're in a hospital. You're being kept alive by the best doctors we have, and by machines made by those doctors. Physically, there isn't much left of you, but we're going to give you a new body. Please be patient. And please co-operate."

The thought was staggering. New body! *Then all that's left of me is—*

She finished it for him. "A brain in a jar, kept alive by pumps and blood-conditioners and electronic impulses. I'm here to try to keep you sane."

George was silent, thinking now in visual images instead of words. A brain in a glass jar, surrounded by fantastic machinery to perform the functions of the human body. And a woman's voice being piped in to him, to keep him from going mad. He'd read about it somewhere—that it had been tried, and was successful up to a point. But the patient had died. He didn't want to die.

I'll try, he thought loudly. I'll try like hell!

GEORGE Jameson, or the part of him that was in the jar, learned quickly. It was two days before he had thoroughly mastered the knack of thinking to himself,

and sub-vocalizing only to others. On the third day he asked Karen for a description of his surroundings.

"You're in a glass jar, about the size and shape of a normal human skull case. Leading in through the sides of the glass are several plastic tubes, a jumble of wires, and a thermometer. Attached to all of this is about a hundred pounds of machinery, gauges, and such."

I must be quite a handsome cuss.

"Oh, yes," she laughed. "Quite colorful, in fact. With those chrome-plated fixtures, you cut quite a figure."

You're talking to me, Karen, and you can't hear me. Tell me, is this being broadcast all over the place, or is it strictly a personal conversation?

"George," she said, "you're somewhat of a novelty. The electrodes that pick up your tiny nerve impulses—the sub-vocalization—feed the signal into a computer-translator sort of thing that changes it into words. Your voice is purely mechanical. It comes through earphones from the translator. Of course, everything we say is automatically recorded."

Is what I think—to myself, that is—is that recorded, too?

"No." Her voice had that same gentle, understanding quality. "We

respect your privacy."

Thanks. I don't guess there would be much I could do about it if you didn't, though.

"I'm proud of you, George. You're taking all this quite calmly."

What have I got to gain by getting excited?

He could almost hear her smile. "Nothing."

Karen.

"What?"

You said something the other day that made me wonder. You said, "Please get well." What did you mean by that?

She hesitated for perhaps a fraction of a second. "Professional pride, I guess. And maybe it was just the thing to say."

Oh. He was silent for a while. Then these experiments haven't worked out too well in the past. It was more of a statement than a question.

He thought he detected a tightness in her voice. "George, you might as well know. You're the first man to have ever progressed this far without going hopelessly insane."

It's nice to know I'm not hopeless.

Silence.

I'm sorry, Karen. Maybe I talk too much.

"Would you like to hear some mu-

sic?" Her voice was normal again, soothing.

That would be nice. As long as it's relaxing. Something by Debussy, or Beethoven, maybe. And please, Karen, accept my apologies for mouthing off like that.

She laughed, softly. "We seem to be forgetting. You're supposed to be the patient. Will you settle for Gershwin while I go hunt up some classical stuff?"

Gladly, sweetheart. Play it softly, huh?

KAREN.

"Yes, George."

You know more than I do what it's best for a patient to learn. Can you tell me all about the setup here?

"Just what is it you want to know?"

My body—I mean my new body. How do they build a human body?

She laughed softly. "They don't," she said. "Medical science can do many things, George, but they can't really build a body."

But you said—

"They can grow one to order, almost. You know what cancer is, don't you?"

Yes.

"Well, the doctors here use what they sometimes call 'controlled cancer'—to grow the human body. That way, they can do in months

what it takes Nature years to accomplish."

George puzzled over this for a moment. If he had had eyebrows, there would have been a frown on his face. If he had a face.

You mean — some other human being gives up his brain to make room for me?

"No, George. It doesn't have a brain. It's just a body, with a small lump at the top of the spinal cord that controls the muscles." Her voice was patient, yet urgent. He had to understand. "You see," she continued, "because of the enormous rate of growth of the rest of the body, the brain — or the mind — doesn't have a chance to develop. The body has no personality — no *being* of its own. It's your body, George. Yours alone."

He was silent for a long time, thinking. Considering the possibilities of a new body. It'll be mine, he told himself, all mine. To taste and hear and feel and smell. To get cold, or warm — to sweat! To walk, to swim, to touch her hand — to see her — to see Karen! To see Karen, who is just a voice; to take her dancing! *How soon can I be in this body?*

"It'll be six months, anyway, George." Her voice seemed to be saying, "Please be patient," just by the tone of it.

Six months! Cooped up in this

—this fishbowl!—for six months more?

"I'm sorry, George. You won't be alone, though — I'll stay with you. That is, if you want me."

He began to laugh. He laughed uproariously. He didn't care that the translator made his laugh into a horrible thing that grated in her ears. Part of the time his laugh was a sob, but it was all the same to the translator.

Do you mind if I call you Mom? There was a catch in his voice. *When I was a kid I used to rely on my mother like this! I've never been so dependent upon another woman in all my life! If I want you! I need you, Karen. Don't leave me!*

"I won't leave you, George—" He had the feeling there was something else she wanted to say, but she didn't.

HE could hear her voice faintly now. She wasn't talking to him, and he had to strain to catch her words.

"He's all right, doctor. For the past few days all he's wanted to talk about is his body. I've been telling him anything he wants to know."

George could barely make out a mumbled answer. It was too far away to hear the words.

"Play the tape, doctor. You'll

see what I mean."

He mustn't let her know he had overheard. He had forgotten all about this being put on tape. He'd have to watch his words from now on. She must have thought she had turned the microphone off when the doctor came in. Mentally, George smiled.

* * *

Karen.

No answer.

Karen!

Silence.

Karen, can you hear me?

Where in the name of heaven did that woman go? Has she left me? Maybe they gave me up for dead.

Karen. I've been sleeping—or day-dreaming. Or maybe it's the middle of the night. Maybe she's asleep. Maybe she's gone.

Karen! She must be asleep. Or maybe she's dead. Or maybe there's a loose connection in the wiring.

Karen! No answer. Nothing but that deep, dead silence. *Karen! Testing. Testing. One, two, three— Testing. Karen. Where are you? Can you hear me, Karen? Karen!*

It seemed like several eternities before she answered.

"George?"

He would have breathed a sigh of relief, if he could.

I thought you'd deserted me. Were you asleep?

She laughed that soft, vibrant laugh. I'm sorry. I just—stepped out."

That's okay, sweetheart. I'm all right. Forget it. But tell me about these things next time, huh? I worry about you when you're gone.

"You shouldn't. I'm a big girl now."

Hey! Is this being recorded?
"Of course."

Who listens to it?

"Oh, a bunch of doctors and medical students."

Any prudes in the audience?

"Not me," she laughed. "But there's bound to be at least one, anyway."

Okay, he said. He spent the next two hours telling bawdy stories.

A MONTH later George knew he had grown to rely on Karen more and more.

In fact, he knew he was falling in love with her.

"Hi," she announced. Her voice sounded excited. George, I just had a look at your body. It's coming along fine—in fact, it's bee-ootiful! I'll be with you in about ten minutes. Enjoy some music while I'm gone. Bye!"

Then the music lanced into his brain at a tremendous volume.

George quivered in real pain as each note blared forth. It was the loudest version of the Warsaw Concerto he ever hoped to hear. As the music progressed, blatting its way through painful crescendos and screaming treble notes, he tried to shut out the sound of it. It was impossible. It was a tearing, screeching nightmare of sound, that put him back on a hurtling elevated train with the sound of a young girl's scream in his ears, and the pain of a body crushed beyond recognition. With a convulsive shudder, George was unconscious.

* * *

"Headache gone yet?" She was concerned.

Yeah, sweetheart. I'd like to wring your lovely neck, though.

"I'm sorry about the music, George. I didn't have the volume adjusted. I won't leave you alone again." There was a note in her voice that George hoped was more than just professional concern.

Karen! You don't have to do that! You'll be tying yourself down. And I don't want that.

"I don't mind, George. I just don't want anything to happen to you. You're something—someone special."

Maybe I don't want it that way. Although I will admit I enjoy your company — but this

around the clock business isn't necessary.

"I want to do it. Okay?"

Okay. I guess I can't stop you. Only don't you ever get tired?

"Sometimes."

Maybe you should let me worry about your welfare for a change. I think you need some sleep. Lie down a little while.

"Sure, boss. Is that an order?"

It's an order.

"I guess I am a little sleepy. Want some music?"

George shuddered. *No! No more records for a long, long time! But leave your microphone on—I like to know that you're there.*

While she slept, he carefully kept his thoughts to himself. She's sleeping the sleep of the exhausted. The little nut, she probably didn't go to bed at all while I was—out. She deserves all the rest she can get.

He listened a long time to her quiet breathing. I wonder what she looks like? Is the rest of her as beautiful as her voice? I can't help it—I'm in love with her. I wish I was more than a brain in a bottle. I wish I could touch her—hold her hand. Silly thought. Like a kid on his first date.

He pictured her in his mind—lovely, vibrant, beautiful. How, he thought savagely, could she ever fall in love with me? Simple

—she couldn't. No woman could love a freak. And I wouldn't want it that way. She'd be throwing her happiness away.

But damn it!—I can't help it if I want her.

I'M neck deep—if I may be permitted to use such an expression—in world affairs. The good doctor read six newspapers to me while you were gone.

Karen laughed. "I thought he sounded a bit hoarse."

Well—out with it, woman! Did you enjoy your first day off in almost three weeks?

Her voice was happier than he had heard it in days. "I went shopping, George, for the first time in months, and—really splurged. Got a new outfit. You should see me."

I wish I could.

"You will soon enough."

What do you mean by that?

"Your body's ready. You move in tomorrow."

Thank God! Tomorrow! It is—rather hard to believe, after all this time! I'm going to have a body. He could almost feel a lump form in his throat, only of course he didn't have a throat—yet. *I don't know if I'm going to like having to put up with the pains of the flesh again.*

She laughed. Then her voice

turned wistful, or maybe it was just his imagination. "Not only the pains, George, but the pleasures, too."

Yeah. He was silent for a moment. Then he forced his voice to be light. *I can't wait for those eyes, Karen. Tell me about the outfit. What color is it—how does the cloth feel? Tell me all about it, Karen.*

* * *

The next day, Karen warned him just before Dr. Chase released the sedative into his blood supply: George peacefully went into a deep, dreamless sleep. In his mind, he could still hear Karen's voice speaking gently to him, assuringly.

Almost instantly, it seemed, he was awake, though it took hours. The first thing he was conscious of was a dull throbbing pain in his head—and then he realized—*it was in his head!*

Vaguely at first, then sharply, as nerves clicked into action, he could sense his arms and legs.

He tried moving them, experimentally. It was a painful process.

There was sound, he realized suddenly—a low, subdued noise level. But there was no *light!*

Karen! Karen! he thought sharply.

Still just that low noise level. An electric fan going somewhere.

Karen! This time he felt the muscles of his throat contract. His breath came out in a sigh of satisfaction. He had been sub-vocalizing through long habit!

"Karen." He said it; he heard his voice.

"George! You made it!" Karen was there.

"Karen," he said again. A little quavering, but it was a voice. "Karen!" he sobbed. "I can't see!"

"Silly!" she laughed. "Of course not—there's a bandage over your eyes. The optic nerve is very delicate. The doctors have to give the nerve-endings—the nerve-graft—more time to heal. Another three days and you'll be able to see."

A low moan from his throat. "Then," he said, haltingly, "you're still only a voice."

"Not quite," she said. She touched his cheek. Cool, soft fingers. "That better? Now you're the one who needs some sleep."

"Karen," he said.

Silently, she took his hand in hers.

AT noon of the fourth day, they removed the bandages from his eyes.

The blinds were drawn on the windows, but still the light was staggering. George squinted until his eyes became accustomed to the

brightness. Then he focused them on various items in the room.

He had just flipped the sheets back from his body and was commenting proudly to himself, "I'm more of a man than I thought," when the door opened.

George looked up, startled.

The most beautiful woman he had ever seen was in the doorway.

"Hi," she said, her voice as soft and vibrant as ever.

"Karen!"

She was staring, unashamed, at the body George had just fully recovered. "Wow!" she said.

George scrambled for the sheets, pulled them over him.

"You should knock," he said, starting to laugh.

She came over to the foot of the bed, and slowly turned around for him. "Well, how about me? Are you disappointed?" Her voice had an intimate, challenging quality.

"Sweetheart," he said slowly, looking at her for what it seemed to George was the first time, "you are lovely. You're more than I ever dreamed. And I don't care what you say or think of me for saying this, but I love you. I've loved you since I first heard your voice. I know it's impossible—no woman could ever knowingly fall in love with me—a freak, a brain in a bottle—but that can't stop me

from loving you. Maybe it's just that I'm so happy to have a body again after so long that makes me say this . . . "

She had come around the corner of the bed, and was sitting on the edge of it now. There were tears in her eyes and her hands were clasped over his. "I know, George," she said slowly, when he had stopped. "I felt the same way as you—when I got my new body—but I didn't have anyone to say it to."

His eyes widened in disbelief. His mouth worked for several seconds before the words would come. "You . . . "

She nodded slowly. "George, don't you remember many months ago—the night of your accident on the el . . . there was a girl on the train with you . . . "

He stared at her, sudden amazement in his eyes. "Of course I remember—but—you—you mean *you are* . . . "

"Yes, George. I'm the same girl—different body, of course. My case wasn't as tough as yours. Your brain was close to death for quite awhile before you regained conscious thought."

He looked at her incredulously. "But you said *I* was the first to ever go this far . . . "

Her face was close to his, her lips smiling. "I said you were the first *man* to pull through. I was praying for you George. I needed you—as much as you thought you needed me . . . "

As his arms closed about her, there wasn't much else for either to say . . .

THE END

★ *Bookkeeper In Space* ★

SPACE travel, which is creeping up on us with frightening rapidity, will divide itself into two periods "B.A.E." and "A.A.E."—Before Atomic Energy and After Atomic Energy. The chances are good that people alive today will see both periods, but for the immediate present, at least for the next few decades, only "B.A.E." will concern us.

Rocketships which use chemical fuel, whatever it may be, will be confined in a sort of strait-jacket of power, because of the famous

law of the Conservation of Energy. A rocketship is a world of its own, and there is no aid from the outside. Consequently a strict debit and credit accounting of every erg of energy it expends, must be made. You don't simply "blast off into space and rocket toward the Moon and planets."

The operation of space travel will be more like the accounting system of a great bank. To go anywhere in space requires the expenditure of energy, the doing of work. Since a rocket can carry only a lim-

ited amount of chemical fuel (atomic energy of course would make this statement false) every single erg of energy in that fuel must be accounted for.

To go from Earth to Mars, for example, requires surprisingly little more fuel than to go from the Earth to the Moon. Of course the time necessary is enormously greater. Your bookkeeper-spaceman can make this necessary balance of energy nicely. He balances gravitational attractions against rocket forces and comes up with his ship in the right spot. Unfortunately every time he makes a maneuver with the rocket engines, he must expect to make an equal maneuver sometime later.

This system of check and counter-check is so demanding that every single gram of mass of fuel, of matter ejected from the ship, of matter taken aboard the ship must be known precisely. Every time the ship gains or loses a single centimeter per second of speed—and its direction—must be known exactly. Only in this way can an astrogator hope to take a rocketship from one place to another and back.

The astrogator is a bookkeeper, far removed from the idea of "hot-rod" pilot. He has plenty of time to make his maneuvers, but God help him if he's off in one decimal place. Brush up on your logarithms brother, rocket travel is just a numbers game!



Kohler

"Near as I can make out he's only four years old—and small for his age!"



The little guy comes into the bar just as the first Marscast is about to start. He scoffs at scientific facts and keeps mumbling about—

THE FROGS OF MARS

By

Roger Dee

THERE was nothing special about the little man who came into Larry's place, unless it might have been his air of vague familiarity and the mixed expression on his face. He looked disgusted and defensive and at the same time a little resentful, with a dash of something else thrown in which none of us recognized until later.

I'd have mistaken him for an-

other reporter from the *Advertiser* across the street if the five newsmen already at the bar hadn't given each other a blank look that meant only one thing: none of them knew him. Neither did Larry, who was trying to bring in the first broadcast from Mars on the television set bracketed to the wall over his whiskey stock, and who wasn't pleased at having his little after-hours party crashed.

"The bar's closed," Larry said. His tone didn't invite argument. "City ordinance. No customers after 1.00 a. m."

The little man looked at the clock, which said 3:15, and then at the front windows which were shuttered tight. Then he looked at the six of us sitting at the bar with our drinks.

"I'll have bourbon and water," he said. He sat down at the end of the bar on the stool next to mine and looked at his reflection in the mirror without approval.

Larry got the look that bartenders get with troublesome customers.

"The bar's closed," he said again. "It's a city—"

"Water on the side," the little man said. "Don't mix it."

Abe Marker, who does sports for the *Advertiser*, got up and checked the front-door lock. The thumb-catch hadn't been thrown, so Abe put it on and came back to the bar.

"Nobody else will wander in," he said. "Make with the t-v, Larry. You're holding up the show."

Larry looked stubborn.

"It's after 1:00 a. m." he said "And that door was supposed to be locked. There's a city ordinance—"

"You're breaking it already," the little man said, looking at us.

He didn't seem angry, just weary and disgusted. "Not that I give a damn. All I want is a bourbon and water."

"Better give it to him, Larry," Willard Saxton said from down the bar. Willard is the *Advertiser's* science editor and is an authority on the planets, especially Mars. "He'll probably turn you in if you throw him out."

Larry muttered and looked mulish, but he rang up the little man's money and gave him a bourbon and water. The little guy drank it and looked at himself in the bar mirror with an expression that was just short of being a sneer. Larry grunted and went back to fiddling with the television set.

Abe Marker came over and sat down on the stool to my left.

"They're doing this all over town tonight," he said, explaining to the little man across me. "The bars have to observe curfew as usual, but most of them are letting a few regular customers stay late to see the Marscast. Everybody is anxious to know what Colonel Sanderson and his crew found up there, so—"

"They're going to be disappointed," the little man said. He sounded sour but positive. "Mars ain't what people think it is, not by a hell of a sight. It stinks."

We all looked up at that, and

somebody snickered.

"Have you been to Mars, sir?"

The little man didn't seem to mind when we laughed.

"Maybe," he said, and shoved his shot glass forward. "Another bourbon, bartender."

THE station announcer came on screen then and told us what we already knew, that contact with Colonel Sanderson's party was delayed because of transmission difficulties. The Sanderson expedition would leave Mars for Earth in two more days, when the current opposition was completed, but in the meantime the program sponsors appreciated the interest shown by their public and would relay the broadcast to us as soon as contact was established.

A film cartoon featuring a lizard named Freddie came on next, and Larry turned down the sound so he could hear orders for refills. The little man drank his bourbon and water and sneered at his reflection in the mirror; none of us paid him any further attention, but talk started up again along the bar.

Somebody at the other end asked how long it took a television signal to travel across all that space, and choked on his drink when Willard Saxton told him.

"My God," he said when he

stopped coughing. "You mean Mars is so far away it takes three minutes just to see it?"

All of us laughed at that but Larry and the little man at the end of the bar.

"What I'm wondering," somebody else said, "Is how the colonel and his boys feel after breathing nothing but canned air for a year."

"Maybe the air up there is better than our scientists think," Abe Marker said. He winked at us and looked at the little man on my right. "How about it, friend? Is the air good on Mars?"

"Breathable, but not good," the little guy said. "It smells like dead fish."

Silence fell along the bar while we waited for a straight man to raise his head.

Willard Saxton took the bait. "And why should it smell so, may I ask?"

"Because Mars is lousy with fish," the little man said. "And because when fish die, they stink."

Larry did a brisk business for a few minutes while we sized the little guy up again. He definitely wasn't drunk, but the task of deciding whether he was being deadpan-comic or just nasty was a sort of challenge that called for thought.

"But you'd need extensive oceans to support so many fish," Willard Saxton argued, still tak-

ing it seriously. "And if Mars had oceans we'd have seen them long ago. They reflect light."

"Mars is too level for oceans," the little man said. "The water spreads out thin to make one big marsh, and you can't see it because the weeds that grow up from the bottom camouflage it."

Somebody down the bar said, "This gets curioser and curioser," and everybody laughed again but Willard and Larry and the little comic. Somebody else asked if he was a professional and what show was he on, but he didn't answer. He just pushed his shot glass forward instead.

"Another bourbon," he said.

The announcer came on screen again when the lizard cartoon went off and said that the Mars party's signal was beginning to come through and that as soon as it cleared up they would put it on the cable. Then he told us about a new kind of pretzel prepared with a special salt guaranteed not to give us hardening of the arteries, and after that we had another film cartoon. This one was about two crows at a circus, but nobody could follow it because Larry turned down the sound again.

Between his third and fourth stingers Willard Saxton—who had a reputation to uphold, being science editor of the *Advertiser*—

had made up his mind by now to put the little man in his place. It burned him brown to see this character drinking bourbon and sneering at himself in the mirror and not caring a damn what we thought, and it put Willard under a sort of obligation to show him up.

"Reliable tests have conclusively proved," Willard said, "that the atmosphere of Mars contains only minute traces of water vapor, and that its oxygen content is less than one-hundredth the density necessary to sustain human life. Spectroanalysis findings—"

"A spectroanalysis of Earth from Mars," the little man said, "shows nothing beyond our Heaviside layer, and proves that we can't live here because nothing can breathe pure ozone."

HE finished his bourbon and made chains of wet rings on the bartop with his glass. The mixed look on his face was so strong that for a moment I almost thought of the name for it.

Willard stalled for time by ordering another stinger—a double, this time—and Abe Marker took over.

"How about those pictures of Martian dust storms the boys at Palomar make?" Abe asked. "You can't have dust storms on a marshy planet, can you?"

"Those aren't dust storms," the little man said. "They're clouds of gnats."

"Gnats?" we all said at once, and somebody down the bar, quicker-witted than the rest of us, added: "Gnats to you too, Charlie!"

"A fact," the little man said, but not as if he cared. "They travel in swarms thousands of miles wide, and they bite like hell."

We sat and watched the two voiceless crows flap through the television cartoon for a while. Nobody spoke until the film was over and the screen went blank, when the little man caught Larry's eye and held up one finger.

"Bourbon," he said.

We heard a confused muttering of voices in the background and waited expectantly for Colonel Sanderson to speak to us from Mars, but apparently the network people were still having trouble with their transmission beam. The screen stayed blank.

"You left out the interesting part, Charlie," somebody called from down the bar. "The Martian natives. How about them?"

"There aren't any—as you'd know them," the little man said. He seemed to grow thoughtful for a moment. "But they are intelligent. They do things you couldn't do."

"Such as what?" somebody

asked.

The little man shrugged. "Teleport. They're good at it too."

Saxton let out a laugh. "That would make them more intelligent than us!" he said. "What do these Martians look like?"

The little man screwed up his face distastefully. "Frogs."

The reporter who had asked about natives got choked on his drink and had to be pounded on the back. On my left, Abe Marker leaned against the bar to look past me at the little guy.

"Frogs we got now," he said admiringly. "By the billions?"

"There are more frogs on Mars," the little man said, "than there are gnats and fish together, and they never stop croaking. You'd have to hear it to believe it."

The television screen lit up suddenly, chopping off conversation, and we were watching the first Marscast in history.

COLONEL Sanderson himself was talking. He looked the way Stanley must have looked when he found Livingstone, gaunt and bearded and jumpy; and his crew, lined up behind him before the ship's pickup camera, were in no better shape. The lot of them stared hungrily out at us as if they had just found a peephole into Heaven and couldn't wait to

see if there was a gate farther along the fence.

"... established conceptions of Martian areography are completely erroneous," the colonel was saying. "There are no drifting deserts of sand or howling typhoons of ferrous dust. We can show you actual conditions better by camera, I think, than they could be detailed in words."

The view jumped to another camera aimed from an outside port, and we saw Mars. Colonel Sanderson's voice kept up a running commentary behind the scene, but we only half heard him.

The ship rested in about two feet of water. Around it the whole world curved up to the horizon in a shallow concave sweep like the inside of a great rusty bowl, lined with knee-high reeds that grew as far as the eye could see out of a knee-deep marsh. A fist-sized sun hung low in the sky, its glare dulled to a muddy crimson by a shimmering cloud of gnats that whirled and danced to infinity. There was a sort of vast, featureless roaring in the background that sounded like Niagara at two hundred yards, not deafening but loud enough to force Colonel Sanderson to raise his voice.

"The frog noise is worst," he was saying. "It drives us to the point of insanity at times... One

member of our party has succumbed to it already, a machinist named Willkins who disappeared two weeks ago. Apparently the poor fellow drowned himself in the marsh, since no trace of him has been found since."

That was when I realized why the little man on the stool beside me looked so familiar—because I had seen his pictures in the papers, along with the rest of Sanderson's crew, a thousand times during the past year. The mixed expression on his face made sense now, too; he wasn't only disgusted and defensive, he was *guilty*.

"So that's how you knew what it was like," I said. "You couldn't stick it out with the others, so you jumped ship. You deserted!"

He gave me a hangdog look. "It's not deserting unless the country is at war," he said. "It's just going over the hill, A.W.O.L."

The television roar got louder, and when I looked up the ship's cameraman was doing a close-up for our benefit. He panned the shot downward until we seemed to be standing ten feet above the marsh, and at that distance I could see plainly what it was that caused the uproar.

The water between the reddish-brown reeds was thick with huge frogs, all blinking and croaking like mad.

I remember thinking then that you couldn't really blame a man for jumping ship in a hole like that. It was bad enough to be stuck thirty-odd million miles from home, so far that light itself needed three minutes to—

"Hey, wait up!" I said to the little guy, who was sneering at himself in the mirror again. "If you went A.W.O.L. up there, then how the hell did you get back here?"

I didn't find out.

The guy was gone. He had been standing there so close I could have touched him, but now he was gone. I looked around quick. Nobody else seemed to have noticed. All eyes were on the TV screen.

Then I saw it. On the floor. Two wet marks—right where the guy should have been, where he was. Two wet marks that had a

funny shape to them—web-like.

I felt my throat tighten at the thought. I shook my head. What was going through it was fantastic, impossible and downright lunacy. There was an intelligent life-form on Mars—beings that looked like frogs and could teleport. Could they also mimic human shape temporarily? Especially if they got hold of one for a model—say a missing crewman . . .

"Hey! Where are you going? Don't you want to see the Mars-cast?"

I was walking to the door. I looked back at the barkeep. "I've seen enough, Larry, I got things to do."

He shrugged. "Yeh, what?"

"Like hunting frogs," I told him as I shoved the door open. "I got a hunch we'll be doing a lot of that before very long . . ."

INTRODUCING the AUTHOR



Roger Dee



(Continued from Page 2)

aginative bug bit early and deep; between the inevitable sandlot baseball rhubarbs and after-school eyeblackings, I fled the neighborhood pack to follow John Carter across the arid face of dying Barsoom and to shriek with juvenile glee over the endless miscarriages

of Hicks' Inventions with a Kick in the old Amazing Stories.

I followed imaginative fiction like the Prophet's faithful, from Cummings to Cabell, but it never occurred to me to write the stuff until after I had weathered a depression that chivvied me into Un-

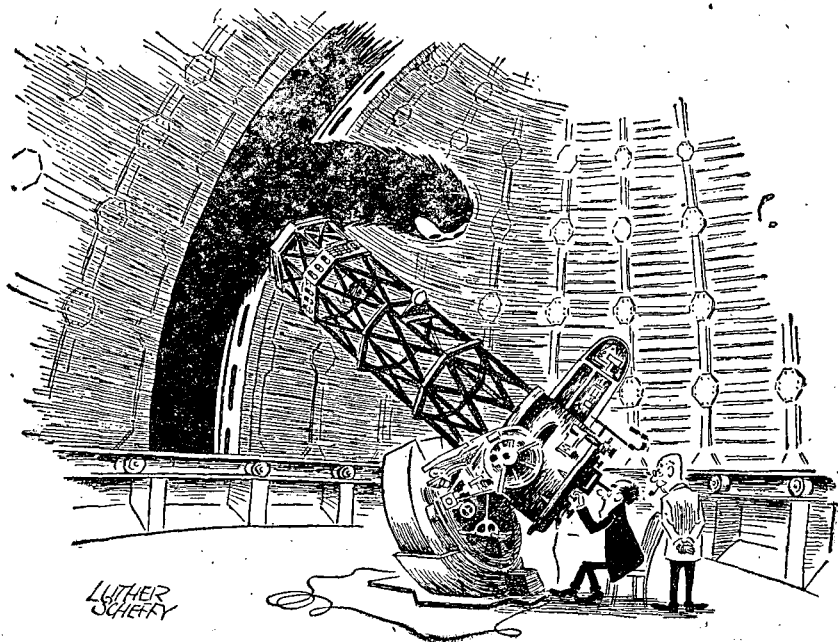
cle Sam's postal service and had survived some three years of service with the Signal Corps during World War II. I realized then, belatedly, that time was a-wasting; so, late in 1948, I sat down and wrote my first s-f story, a 1400-word tale of a sylvan Utopia of the future in which my protagonist's fellows tossed him tail-over-tincup off a cliff for re-inventing the wheelbarrow.

I'm a part-time producer as yet, being both cautious and married, but the day of deliverance cometh.

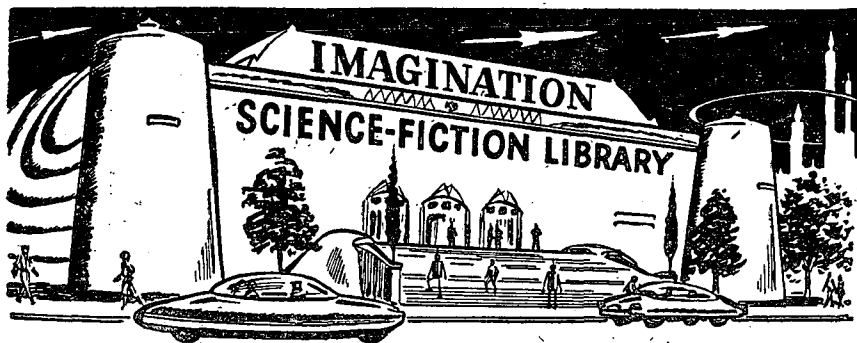
I'm a slow writer, much addicted to revision and double-checking, and am inclined during moments of frustration toward head-banging and typewriter-smashing. I believe most earnestly that the writing of fiction is a craft rather than an art, and that anyone who is willing to work like hell for a problematical payoff can attain to reasonable competence in that craft.

I sincerely hope you'll enjoy reading **THE FROGS OF MARS** as much as I enjoyed writing it.

—Roger Dee



"I'm afraid it's going to be another one of those bad nights' for us!"



— REVIEWING CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS —

Conducted by Henry Bott & Mark Reinsberg

Hard cover science fiction is booming and many fine novels and anthologies are available at all bookstores or by writing direct to the publishers. Each month IMAGINATION will review several titles — candidly — as a guide to your book purchases.

COSTIGAN'S NEEDLE

by Jerry Sohl. 250 pages, \$2.50, Rhinehart and Company, Inc. New York, N. Y.

Ineptly written, with one dimensional characterization, this novel never-the-less has the redeeming virtue of being the flesh for the skeleton of a good idea. As a result, you'll find that once you begin the story you'll finish it!

Doctor Costigan designs a "Needle", a rather contrived name for an intra-dimensional stepping stone. Living things only—not even the fillings in one's teeth!—pass through the eye of this needle into another place and time. The story is of course about what happens when the apparatus goes hay-

wire and a whole colony of humans enters the "other" regions.

The book is essentially a variant of the Swiss Family Robinson theme with modern settings. In the hands of a writer much has been done with this idea. But "Costigan's Needle" leaves more than a little to be desired.

In spite of the manifold flaws in the story, you can't avoid becoming interested in the problem of creating a civilization from scratch! As you read through Devan Traylor's efforts to re-create the Twentieth Century from the materials of the Stone Age, you'll find your mind tussling with the problem, perhaps better than the author did . . . HB

SCIENCE FICTION HANDBOOK

by L. Sprague de Camp. 328 pages, \$3.50. *Hermitage House, New York.*

Most fans harbor the secret desire to write science-fiction, as well as read it. Here is a book that tells them how. Complete with addresses, rates and manuscripts instructions, it offers sympathetic, practical market guidance — of a kind never before available in the s-f field.

Authoritative—by one of the most successful of present-day fantastic writers—the book presents unusually candid views of Mr. de Camp's own creative life and work habits. He not only tells how he gets his ideas and what he does with them,

but what he thinks of fans, editors and other science-fiction writers.

Less original and less entertaining is the author's historical survey of imaginative writing from Plato's time to the present, contained in the early chapters. Rather surprisingly, it stumbles over definitions of science-fiction, failing to achieve a synthesis to match John W. Campbell's "romanticism of the technological age."

But otherwise, *Science Fiction Handbook* is a valuable—perhaps even indispensable—coach for aspiring s-f writers. De Camp admirers will especially enjoy the biographical glimpses . . . MR

THE STAR SEEKERS

by Milton Lesser. 212 pages, \$2.00. *The John C. Winston Company, Philadelphia, Pa.*

I'd venture a guess: the percentage of good novels among the new books is higher in the so-called "juvenile class" than it is among the adult books! If this seems heresy, examine the newer offerings.

Consider "The Star Seekers". This is the story of the first journey to the stars. It is an old idea; what would the incredibly long and tedious trip to Alpha Centauri be like? Skillfully Mr. Lesser makes us observe through the eyes of an eighteen-year old boy the exciting voyage through space so vast as to be difficult to conceive of. The narrative comes uncomfortably close to Heinlein's famous "Universe" what with the idea of the ship's society disintegrating into a super-

stitious pseudo-religious social organization. But such ideas are really common property and Lesser can be forgiven because he has done so well with the idea.

Young Mikal makes the inevitable technological discoveries and this comprises the core of the story. Surprisingly enough the characterization is good and Mikal, Rolf, and Marlyn are more than names.

Lesser's suggestion of using a hollowed-out meteorite of huge size, is not without a certain technological merit even though we can't imagine its use for a long time. Regardless of the interstellar vehicle, the journey is fascinating.

If you've been more than a little unsatisfied with science-fiction, come journey through interstellar space on the most stupendous voyage of all! . . . HB



Conducted by Mari Wolf

SINCE this is a column devoted to fan magazine reviews, I if anyone, should be able to answer the question, "What is a fanzine magazine?" And yet in a lot of cases it's almost impossible to say, "This is one," or "That isn't one." Fanzines come in too many forms, stress too many facets of stf, and are put out by too many different kinds of people.

Perhaps the best definition of a fanzine is "An amateur publication produced by a fan, or fans." This definition, however, merely pushes the problem back one step farther. What is a fan? A person who reads, discusses, and enjoys science fiction and/or fantasy. A person who desires to be in correspondence with others of similar likes, and who wants to do something creative in the field of writing or illustrating or reviewing . . .

But then there are the borderline

cases. I get them every issue, and I imagine that whether I include them as fanzines or not is something I arbitrarily determine from my ideas as to what constitutes science fiction. Now obviously, stories about flying saucers are stf (or fantasy, if you're a purist about these things); they're not realism. A saucer isn't a documented, analyzed, and accepted reality in this world of the mid-twentieth century.

There are lots of people who belong to the different saucer organizations. There are magazines and newspapers of varying caliber written on the saucers and on saucer sightings. I get quite a few of these; I haven't been in the practice of reviewing them. Why? Probably there are quite a few readers who'd like to read, or at least sample, these saucer zines; there might indeed be a large num-

ber. among you who class yourselves as saucer sighters.

I suppose that the reason I haven't been reviewing these zines is, that to me at least, they lie outside the field of science fiction fandom. Sometimes I have reviewed periodicals from allied fields; this time I'm reviewing a zine about saucers. But with a mental reservation; to me, saucer publications aren't fanzines. Any more than the Pacific Rocket Society Bulletin is a fanzine, or the PRS members fans. (Although as I see it, a rocket society, being interested in experimenting with extensions of known science and doing so by following accepted scientific methods of research, lies a thousand times closer to the field of true science fiction than do any of the societies for the investigation of parapsychical phenomena. Another personal bias, I imagine.)

There have been many other non-science-fiction publications that I've received. Some of them have been "little" magazines publishing a high caliber of stories and essays; these I have often reviewed, though stating that their fantasy content or stf slant was low. Some have had no connection with stf at all, and these I haven't reviewed, though I've enjoyed reading many of them.

But as to just what constitutes a fanzine, I don't know. What are the limits? There are magazines like the Science Fiction Advertiser and Fantastic Worlds, beautiful photo offset publications with excellent material and artwork and some of the most informative discussions on the background ma-

terial of science and stf that you'll find anywhere. There are magazines like Slant, the North Irish journal, where you'll find experiments in cover design, a fine writing style, and some of the best humor anywhere, as well as more serious discussion and fiction. These are fanzines, sure. Some of the best. But not necessarily representative.

You'll find the specialized fanzines. There are the news journals, such as Fantasy Times, which is a twice-a-month newspaper covering the entire stf field. You'll find trading journals and zines devoted solely to collecting—such as the Kaymar Trader, which is so specialized that it's invaluable if you're buying or selling stf, but not of interest otherwise. There are fanzines featuring cartoons, and fanzines featuring jokes, and fanzines featuring comics; what makes them fanzines instead of general interest cartoon or comic or joke books is that their emphasis is on science fiction—on the ideas, terminology and personalities of the stf field.

There are poetry fanzines, like Starlanes, where almost all the verse has a fantasy orientation. There are all the bulletins put out by different science fiction clubs, featuring club news and meetings and organizations. There are just about as many types of fanzines as there are types of magazines in general.

THERE are, in addition to the fanzines circulated through the general readership, a large number put out for the different ama-

teur press associations. FAPA (Fantasy Amateur Press Association) and SAPS (Spectator Amateur Press Society) have been functioning for a long time now. You don't often see a copy of a fanzine published for either one in general circulation; there are exceptions, but usually the zines circulate among members only. The qualifications for belonging to one of these organizations are rather rigid; you must first join a waiting list and enter the club only when a vacancy occurs. During your membership you must put out a given number of pages of fanzine material per quarter; you may write or publish or both, but your quota of pages, whether you've done them for your own zine, or for someone else's, must be in every mailing. These mailings tend to become, of course, personal, with all the membership aware of personalities and events told about in different fanzines. They also contain some of the highest quality amateur stuff you'll find, simply because they are produced, by and large, by fans with a relatively long experience in the amateur writing and publishing fields.

There's a new group springing up, I hear, of the new fans who call themselves Seventh Fandom (having divided the entire length of the science fiction era into seven groups which emphasize different trends of fan activity from the origin of fandom up to the present, and assigning different people to one or another of the groups on a chronological basis). I don't know much about it, but judging from some of the new so-

called 7th fans, it ought to be a humdinger.

Also there are, of course, all the general interest fanzines, ranging through the whole gamut of literary worth and artistic appearance, not to mention legibility. There are fanzines that have been going on for years and years, and there are brand new ones. There are fanzines put out by old time clubs and old time fans; there are the first issues by some young boy or girl who has just discovered science fiction. Most of them, even the newest, the worst printed, have something of interest in them. But if you're a reviewer, you find that you have to be somewhat arbitrary in deciding what you're going to review. I have a few rules of thumb I follow. They may not be fair; I've been accused of being unfair quite often, but to me they seem the best I can do.

If a fanzine is very new, and obviously experimental, and not very well written, and furthermore comes equipped with a high price relatively speaking, I don't review it. It doesn't seem fair to me to expect a reader to pay twenty or twenty-five cents for something he can barely read. I don't want to give bad reviews to a new fanzine either; usually after an issue or two it improves to the point where it can be recommended or it drops by the wayside.

If a fanzine is directed almost entirely at one group of people, so that it's completely unintelligible to outsiders to the clique, I usually don't review it either. However, there are a lot of fanzines that really aren't anything world shak-

ing, that publish what you might call typical fan material, that I'm sure will interest a lot of people. I like reading them. I like reviewing them. I hope other people read and like them too, and if I can bring a person who's interested in fandom into contact with a fanzine he or she likes, into contact perhaps with fans he or she will get to like, that's what I want to do.

When reviewing fanzines you don't say eenie meenie mynie mo and then grab whatever one comes up. Nor do you limit yourself to the most expensively produced zines, those put out by people with the finances and the resources to attempt a semi-professional quality.

You try to cover the field, insisting however on a certain basic quality of legibility and readability, and you try to inform readers as to what type of fanzine they can expect for their nickel, dime, or quarter. Obviously, not everyone is going to be pleased. A lot of people just don't like amateur writing, or humor, or fiction.

As for the off-the-beaten path-of-fandom fanzines such as saucer reviews, if you're like me you'll work them in once in a while for the benefit of those who are particularly interested in such things.

* * *

Now to the fanzines.

HYPHEN: 25c; Walt Willis, 170 Upper Newtownards Rd., Belfast, North Ireland. Or you can get this one for 1/6 or a U.S. pro magazine.

Here's another fine offering from the editor of Slant—and that should be nuff said. But if you've never read Willis you can start

remedying the oversight now . . .

In Hyphen this issue there's a long, hilarious account by James White about a trip through Ireland with Bea Mahaffey (Co-ed of Universe). Willis introduces the article with the real beginning of the story, which is his meeting Bea at the airport, and then White joins them and takes over the narration. What a trip it must have been.

Then after you have accompanied White "Through Darkest Ireland Carrying a Torch for Bea Mahaffey," you find yourself with Willis at the Coroncon (London's Science Fiction Convention) or "Through Darkest England Burning the Candle at Both Ends." Now, I've been to some science fiction conventions, and I've read some fine convention reports, but never anything like this report of Walt's. It makes you wish you could travel backwards in time and get in on the festivities yourself.

Recommended reading? And how!

* * *

FANTASTIC WORLDS: 30c; Sam Sackett, 1449 Brockton Ave., Los Angeles 25, Calif. Fantastic Worlds is now being published semi-annually, but there doesn't seem to be much danger of its stopping altogether. The issues contain more material than ever; the format and artwork and quality of the photo offset printing are tops, and so are many of the stories and articles.

In the current issue there's an extremely off-trail story by long-time writer David H. Keller, M.D. It's "The Question," and it revolves around a most unusual solution to a problem . . .

David Bunch in his "The Mad

Man from Machinery Row" tells of a man who goes out on certain nights to battle machines—inanimate, twentieth century ones, not futuristic robots or anything overtly sinister. And William L. Bade writes a story, or perhaps an allegory, of a man's quest for knowledge on a barbarian world in "The Eight Hundredth Hundred-Day."

It's an excellent issue, as usual. And if you write for it and your work is accepted you might even get paid—there are cash prizes given for the best stories as determined by vote of the readers.

* * *

THE SAUCERIAN: 35c; Gray Barker, Box 981, Clarksburg, W. Va. In this publication you'll find all the news about flying saucer sightings and the leading personalities in saucer circles. I'm hardly qualified to give an impartial review, I'll admit; but I imagine that if you believe in the saucers and want to get in touch with others who do you'll like this publication very much.

There's a lengthy account by Editor Barker on the saucer seen at Brush Creek, California. The account, and others published in the Saucerian, are not put forward as the absolute unquestionable truth, as they have been in other magazines. The people connected with the Saucerian evidently intended to be openminded; but they obviously believe in vehicles inhabited by some extra-terrestrial species as being the cause of the flying saucer phenomena.

* * *

MOTE: 5c; bimonthly; Robert Peatrowsky, Box 634, Norfolk,

Nebr. Mote is now fatter than ever—sixty pages, albeit half-sized pages—but it's still only a nickel. How do you do it, Bob?

From the front cover by Bergeron to the back cover by ESHM, there's a lot of good material in this issue. There's the editorial Re: Mote. There's Vernon McCain's article, "The Multi-pros," about science fiction professionals who are or have been both writers and artists, or even writers-artists-editors. Some of the diversity of talent exhibited by your favorites may surprise you.

Jack Harness reports on the MidwestCon (these regional conferences can be a lot of fun; read an article like this and you'll wish you'd been there.). Russel Watkins writes "An Essay on Fans," from human to electric. And there's a rousing letter column too.

Send in your nickel. What can you lose?

* * *

FANTASY TIMES: 10c; published twice a month; James V. Taurasi, 137-03 32nd, Ave., Flushing 54, N. Y. The dependable newspaper of science fiction goes on and on, never missing an issue, arriving right on time month after month. Sometimes you wonder how editor Taurasi and staff keep it up—and in their spare time too.

Here you'll find all the science fiction news, from convention reports to the advent or demise of a new magazine. Whatever happens in the stf world, in the U. S. or abroad, in the book or magazine or movie fields, you'll find out all the facts here. Also, you'll find informative and most interesting ac-

counts of any conventions or regional sf conferences that may be under way.

* * *

SPACESHIP: 10c; quarterly; Bob Silverberg, 760 Montgomery St., Brooklyn 13, N. Y. Lately there's been quite a to-do in fanzines on the subject of fan fiction. There are quite a few who oppose it. They say, if it's good it would be in a pro magazine, and if it's bad, why print it? And it's true that you'll find some very bad fiction in fanzines.

But not in Spaceship. Whatever you find here, whether stories or articles, or columns, you know will be well written. The fiction, such as Fred Chappell's "Brother," and Dave Mason's "Dragons" in this issue, may be short and may be more incident than story—but will still be enjoyable to read.

Red Boggs' file 13 goes on, one of fandom's top columns. Larry Stark rips into sf, Hollywood style, with his attack on the movie notion that "Science Fiction is for Kids." And Roger Dard reports on Australian fan activities.

A good issue, as usual.

* * *

BREVZINE ADVENTURES: 10c; bimonthly; Warren A. Freiberg, 5369 W. 89th. St., Oak Lawn, Ill. In this zine you'll find lots of fan fiction. Some of it is very good, and some of it is so-so. If only the editors would stop claiming that each story and each writer is the most tremendous thing ever to hit the amateur publishing world, the zine might look a lot better.

In the issue Robert G. Warner's "Away on a Dim Green World,"

is a weird fantasy about a dream world come true, and Freiberg's "My Lorelei," is really more of a murder story than sf.

There's an unusual issue coming up, priced at 15c, that ought to have a lot of good material in it. Only why not cut the stupendous, tremendous, super colossal build-up?

* * *

PSYCHOTIC: 10c; monthly; Richard E. Geis, 2631 N. Mississippi, Apt. 106, Portland 12, Oregon. If you haven't seen this one send in your dime right away. Either you will go all out for it or you'll hate it—and you'll get more than your dime's worth either way. It's definitely a one-man opinion zine, apt to be highly controversial, and distinctive. In an age where a lot of fans are accusing other fans of copying their zines, Geis stands alone. You couldn't confuse Psychotic with anything else.

Me, I think it's the greatest.

Geis' covers are simple and uncluttered, with really good drawings (Geis'). You don't fully appreciate the back cover until your second or third issue. But you can appreciate the contents—the controversy over fan fiction, the heated letters-to-the-editor, and above all, Geis' opinion of things, science fictional and otherwise.

In the issue I have here there's Charles Harris' excellent Philcon report. There's Larry Balint's column and a cartoon by Dignin that you'd have to see for yourself. It's all dittoed, but a fine job, legible and attractive, and as I've said before, if you don't think this one is worth a dime, just-ten-cents-

ladeez-and gentlemen, well, you'll never be a true fan . . .

* * *

KAYMAR TRADER: 10c; monthly; K. Martin Carlson, 1028 Third Ave. So., Moorhead, Minn. Here's the fanzine for the collector of science fiction magazines and books. Here you'll find offered for sale the items you need to round out your collection, whether they're back issues of stf magazines or relatively hard to get books. Also, if you have magazines you'd like to sell, this is the place to list them.

It's all advertising, except for a brief review section. But if you're interested in collecting, you'll be interested in this.

* * *

A LA SPACE: 20c; bimonthly; Kent Corey, Box 64, Enid, Oklahoma. In this fannish fanzine you will find articles, columns, reports on fan doings (especially on the activities of the nebulous group called seventh fandom) and even a comic strip take-off on Pogo in which many of the characters attain the facial expressions of the originals, Ray Ogden's "Nogo: in, It Came From Deep Space" is really fun.

Shelden Deretchin writes a column on the Philcon, or Philadelphia World Science Fiction Convention, and Carol McKenney reviews pro magazine stf stories. Then, by a couple of pseudonymns perhaps, come Stuart K. Nock's "How to Publish a Fanzine" and Prunella Larson's "Gossip Page."

* * *

FANTASTIC STORY MAG: 10c; monthly, Ron Ellik, 232 Santa Ana, Long Beach 3, Calif. Here's a fan-

zine in the reprint field—reprinting from other fanzines. While occasionally you'll see a reprint in an amateur stf publication, it's surprising to run across a *policy* of second-hand work. Still, there has been a lot published in the past that's worth rereading, and that would certainly be of interest to new readers.

But FSM apparently has the odd policy of running the material first and asking permission afterwards. For at least three times in this issue there are footnotes apologizing to the authors for not contacting them before running their stories.

The material is interesting. E. Everett Evans, Dorothea Faulkner, George Wetzel and Malcolm Willets and quite a few more. But are you sure none of them object?

* * *

THURBAN I: 10c; Warren Dennis, 511 Plaisance Ave., Rockford, Ill. This is a fairly new fanzine, mimeoed, that offers fiction, poetry, and articles on science fiction, including reviews of other fanzines. James White's story in the last two issues is especially interesting though familiar in plot. I wish though that fanzines wouldn't run serials . . .

The name of the magazine, Dennis says, is derived from the star Thuban, the r having been added to make it easier to pronounce.

It's an easy to read zine, with unusual features such as the sports report, in which results of various interplanetary and interstellar basketball games are announced. Prize upset: Syrtis College over Mars University.

* * *

THE BERKELY BEM: 10c; M. A. Southworth, 1125 Larkmoor, Berkeley, Mich. In this fannish type zine you'll find fiction, articles, and columns, most of them in a lighter vein.

Rhines and Southworth write on "The Birth of a Fanzine," all in verse. There are other stories and articles too. And if you're a member of the Michigan Science Fiction Society you can get the BB for only a nickel.

* * *

INSIDE: 25c; Ron Smith; 332 E. Date St., Oxnard, Calif. In this excellent and relatively new photo-offset fanzine you'll find top amateur fiction and articles of special interest to all those really interested in stf.

Editor Smith does his best to obtain top material, even paying for writing and artwork. You won't get rich writing for the "little" magazines, but you'll be in fine company if you can do it.

In this issue William Nolan, who has himself published some of the best articles on Ray Bradbury I've read, writes "The Bradbury Years,"

a chronological index of what Ray has written. Very interesting, and I'm sure that even if you're an ardent Bradbury-phile you'll learn some new facts here. For example, some of the stories reprinted lately date way, way back in the forties . . .

Among the fiction there's Kris Neville's fine mood story, "The Skipper," about an old space-ship captain whose ship is being decommissioned and whose men are being reassigned, but who hasn't been given any new assignment himself.

There are stories too by Edward Ludwig and Weaver Wright. And the cover is by Mel Hunter! If only that cover had been bigger. Need I say more?

It's a very good zine, one I hope you get acquainted with.

* * *

That's about all for this time. Next issue there'll be more. Remember, if you have a fanzine you want reviewed, send it to me, Mari Wolf, *Fandora's Box*, IMAGINATION, Box 230, Evanston, Ill. See you next month . . .

—Mari Wolf



"Revolutionary new rocket fuel, my eye!
I know bourbon when I smell it!"

Letters from the Readers

YOU CRAZY MARTIAN!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

You asked for comment on Sam Johnson's letter in the January issue of *Madge*. In short, you asked for it!

I should say at the outset that I am a Martian, and consequently I regard your species as a loathsome monsterish and frighteningly unsane type of galactic excrement. However, like all Martians I have the capacity for being impartially objective, a trait you humans lack so conspicuously.

First, to define science by classification, which requires charts, etc. Space lacks, so I will content myself by a statement of definition. To wit.

Science fiction is a class of fiction which . . . A: deals with a story-reality which in one or more aspects does not parallel actual reality (past or present) as the reader conceives of reality, and . . . B: uses the principle of applied science (directly or by inference) as an agency of plausibility.

Fantasy, of course, differs from SF in that it uses the principle of the supernatural as its agency of plausibility.

This definition of science fiction will appear inadequate to those of narrow perspective (to science worshippers, blood lovers, sex droolers, etc.). However, to differentiate further would be merely to subdivide the basic class, science fiction.

Yet, dyed-in-the-head fans will feel that something is lacking; that "their" type of SF has not been defined. Being human, and thus unable to self-analyze, they dunno *what* quality does distinguish the "fan's SF" from say, a movie depicting Cary Grant as the discoverer of a perpetual youth drug. Being Martian, I of course find this problem of human-analysis extremely elementary.

Briefly, the SF fan is a non-conformist, a rebel against the status quo (in one or more respects) of present-day society. As a rebel, he requires that in his fiction the rebel point-of-view (and those protagonists who uphold it) shall pre-

vail over the conformist point-of-view. (And those unspeakable villains who support same.)

Conversely, the non-reader of SF is a conformist, and as such he requires that in his fiction the conformist viewpoint shall be upheld.

For this reason, SF as at present slanted will never become popular nor progress beyond the semi-pulp stage. Of course, a type of SF, slanted to suit conformist views will achieve some vogue sandwiched into the slicks, other types of literary fudge, and will find little market outside of the comic books. (No publisher of comic books would dare teach anti-normal ideas to dear little young America.)

Incidentally, SF fans number many teenagers because the teener is *naturally* going through a period of rebellion against what he considers the stupid conventions of an adult society.

Again, the SF is not, as he thinks, necessarily more intelligent as a group than the non-fans. You humans, in your customary unsane fashion, *measure* intelligence, yet you do not have as much idea of what intelligence *is* as does a Martian Sniffbug. (A particularly stupid type of beetle which tracks its prey by scent and which often, attracted by its *own* scent, spends hours chasing itself like a dog after its tail.)

We Martians learn, while still in the larval stage, that intelligence is the ability to determine truth, but since truth is entirely relative to point-of-view, then the primary factor governing intelligence is the ability to isolate and define point-of-view. You humans,

SF fans included, are constitutionally incapable of performing this primary function of intelligence. Which is why your world is so utterly mad!

H. Maxwell

354 W. 56th St.

New York 19, N. Y.

Say, bub, we humans, ah, admittedly, ah, ain't very intelli-, ah, intelli-, ah, smart. But tell us, bub, what, ah, what do them rebels you, ah, talk about have to, ah, do with science fiction? You want to, ah, start the Civil War over again, huh? And all this, ah, glop about what is SF just plain puzzles us. Science fiction is, ah, easy to define, bub. THE BEST DARN READING THERE IS!—Here or on Mars! Huh? wll

TOP WRITER DEBATE

Dear Ed:

Just finished the January issue of Madge. It wasn't so good . . . This issue almost slipped down to the level of the other mags in the field! Most of the stories were average, but the only one I definitely disliked was **TO SUP WITH THE DEVIL**. Seems to me that theme is a bit overworked. **REPEAT PERFORMANCE** might have some error in it. I don't know. When I read it I get lost.

Now I'd like to take issue with Peter Kreeft in the letter section, and then with you. First Kreeft. What do you mean Heinlein is one of s-f's top writers? He is the best although I concede that Van Vogt is almost as good—but not quite. But as for Bradbury towering over Heinlein, you're not being quite fair. Bradbury is in a class by

himself. You can't judge whether his stories are good or bad because we haven't anything to judge him by. No one else writes like him. He doesn't write s-f, it just happens to be the most convenient means of getting his ideas across to us. If Bradbury wrote a western story and you read it you would know right away that it was a Bradbury story because it would have that certain something that characterizes every Bradbury story. It seems to me that Bradbury is introducing an entirely new kind of literature, a new kind of s-f if you like. But the fact remains that you can't judge Bradbury yet. Nevertheless, I'd like to see a new Bradbury story in Madge.

Now for you, Bill. In your reply to Don Donnell's letter you call Madge, Galaxy and Astounding the big three in s-f. No offense meant, but as far as I am concerned it's just the big two and they're Madge and Astounding.

Keep those cartoons coming!

Russel L. Brown
Box 122
Palisade, Nebr.

What you got against Galaxy Russ? We think it's a fine magazine. As to the top writer argument, there's another letter following . . . wh

POETIC PROSE, BUT . . .

Dear Bill:

About Peter Kreeft's letter in the January issue of Madge. He's right about Heinlein. He's not s-f's top writer. But neither is Ray Bradbury! In fact, Bradbury rates very low on my hit parade of SF authors. It has been whispered around that Bradbury is a literary

artist—that his very words are poetry. Maybe so — I just don't like poetry! Good writing in Bradbury's case does not mean good reading!

Denver Johnson
1600 Elkins St.
Knoxville, Tenn.

Say, fellas, as long as you're talking about top writers, what's wrong with Geoff St. Reynard, Kris Neville, Dwight Swain, Dan Galouye, Charlie Myers, and a host of others? They're A1 in our book any time!
... wh

HONEST EDITORIAL . . .

Dear Bill:

I have not always agreed with you in the past, but I must admit that you were completely honest in your January editorial about the Philadelphia Convention. I ought to know. I was there.

There was a smallness of planning and accomplishment which portends ill for science fiction. There were many who enjoyed themselves merely because there was plenty of wine, women and song—if so, why have a convention at all? As for me, I think my time and money are worth more than to be wasted on small, dull, boring house parties. I go no more.

Edward Wood
31 N. Aberdeen St.
Chicago, Ill.

Your reaction to the Philcon is the very danger of which we spoke, Ed. You'll go no more . . . Hardcore science fiction fandom better sit up and take notice fast that a World Convention is not a local pow-pow or mutual back-slapping society. A World Convention must have a ter-

rific program—and not just speeches that put you to sleep. The Chicon set the stage—and a darned good one. Future conventions (including the forthcoming Frisco affair) better come up with one as equally good or they'll play to an empty house wh

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Dear Ed:

Of interest to Madge's readers is the fact that the 5th Annual Indian Lake SF Conference will be held at the Hotel Ingalls, Bellefontaine, Ohio on May 22, 23.

There are no dues, no formal program, nothing to do except make your own hotel reservation and attend. Many well known fans and pros have attended the previous 4 conferences, which have proved to be outstanding s-f events each year.

We'd appreciate it if you'd make the announcement in Madge.

C. L. Barrett, M. D.
129 Maple Ave.
Sharonville, Ohio

Glad to oblige, doc. Any interested fans will be assured of a good time in informal discussions at this annual conference wh

HAIL THE STAPLE!

Dear Bill: —

My wildest dream has come true. Madge is not just stuck together with watery glue—she no longer comes apart at the seams. What do I find? A great big beautiful staple! But now that I have tasted glory I must have two spanking big staples to make Madge the trimmest magazine on the stands.

Say, what happened to *Other*

Worlds? I've hunted high and low. Was Ray Palmer kidnapped by the Lemurians or is he hiding from his readers?

Also, what is the cause of the sudden lack of pages in such magazines as *If*, *Amazing Stories*, *Fantastic*, etc. It certainly can't be a lack of good material . . .

Your editorial gets a hearty second here. I think an SF convention is an event of much anticipation among fans, the majority of whom have no active connection with Fandom. I think an SF convention should have enough to see for all the attending fans to keep happy. —And to make them glad they came. I compare an SF convention almost with a trip to the Moon. All the fans who attend should find the program a thrilling experience. I hope San Francisco puts on a show really worth seeing this year. I've been to San Francisco and it is the only large city I've ever liked. The people are friendly, and the atmosphere is pleasant—though a little thick at times.

Get Malcolm Smith to do another astronomical cover—they're the best in the field.

And find Ray Palmer. It's got me worried.

Peter Eberhard
44 Mountain View Ave.
Pearl River, N. Y.

Glad you like Madge's great big staple. We like using only one because it allows you to open the book better top and bottom. What happened to Other Worlds? Ray Palmer isn't hiding — he simply changed the title—or rather abbreviated it from Other Worlds Science Stories to just plain Science Stories. You should be able to find

a copy on your local newsstand . . . The cut in pages of the magazines you mention (and effective with this issue Madge too) is an economy step. To be perfectly frank, costs continued to rise during 1953, and ironically, there was a general sales slump which still has not corrected itself. In Madge's case, rather than cut back to bi-monthly schedule we felt you'd rather have the magazine every month even though we had to cut the number of pages. However, the number of pages (within limits, naturally!) isn't the criterion of a good magazine—it's what the pages contain. In Madge you can rest assured you'll continue to receive the finest science fiction reading in the market. Glad you liked the January editorial. We felt it was about time something positive was said in regard to World Science Fiction Conventions . . . Good news from Malcolm Smith—he's finished a new astronomical photo cover, and you'll be seeing it on Madge very soon . . . : . with

HE WRIT A POME . . .

Dear Bill:

*O alas and alack
Once more I am back
To the station of buying my
Madge at the stands;
I'm down with the rest
And it's not the best
But alas and alack
My sub just ran out!*

Oh, Ghud Ghu! What lousy poetry. But Madge inspires me to poetic heights . . . A lovely creature, your gal and mine! (For the preceding rot you should send me a complimentary subscription!)

Bill, by your editorial in the January issue you are requesting a bomb from every active fan in the circulation of Madge. I myself was riled, being somewhat active.

Anyway, of course, it's a good idea to have a con for neo and non-fen. Sure it's a good idea to have the actifen out of the thing a little more. But you will admit that the neos and nons are *not* the supporters of stf.

If it were not for the active fen, how would a letter column be run? The non fen are the bulk of your circulation who didn't write in for Madge's contest last fall, aren't they? They *are*, admittedly, buyers of and readers of science fiction, but if it were not for the actifen, who would tell a writer or an editor off when he did something wrong? Circulation figures help, but letters give a more detailed opinion.

If a fellow stops buying a magazine it could be because he doesn't like its editorial policy as a whole, because he has a gripe with the editor, because he dislikes certain authors' work, or because—Good Ghu, man, there are just too many dozen reasons to list! How can you know, save through letters?

So, while the non-fan should have a little more to say at the San Francisco convention come Labor Day, why not admit that the active fan has a little right to things too. After all, an active fan group in Frisco is putting it on!

Ron Ellik
232 Santa Ana
Long Beach 3, Cal.

Someplace along the line you got your signals mixed, Ron. We never suggested in our editorial—or any

other place—that the active fans should take a back seat at a World Convention. The point is, we don't like to see any science fiction reader be slighted, and when a mediocre program is put on it ruins the convention for the non-fan. The actives like to congregate in hotel rooms for long bull sessions — to them this is the convention. The unknown reader from Broken Clavicle, Utah, doesn't partake of these fan bull sessions—indeed, is not aware of them. All he sees is the program in the Main Hall. We're for a lavish program—the earmark of a WORLD convention. . . . Letters from readers are predominant-ly from non-active fans. But letters,

no matter who they come from, are not in sufficient volume to indicate overall reader tastes. Circulation figures are the voice from the “unknown” audience. (Not to be used as an argument for the '53 slump—that was a general slump that hit every magazine in the field.) However, we want letters — gadzooks, we've been hollering for years for a flood of mail very month. Not a hundred, but thousands! . . . As to the pome you writ, why shucks, Ron:

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We'll truly admit, son;
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. . . wlk

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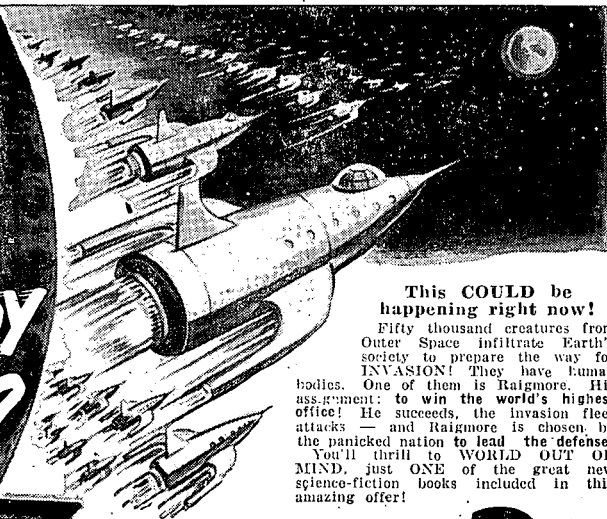
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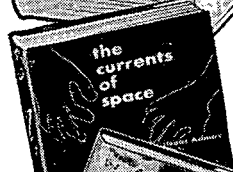
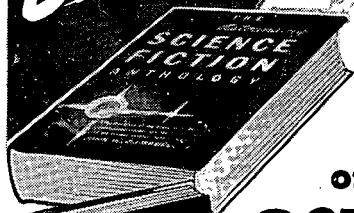
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